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**COMPUTERIZED MYSTERY OF THE
MOATED GRANGE**

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"It's a tremendous secret"

(P. 156)

THE MYSTERY OF THE MOATED GRANGE

Angela Brazil

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY MARGARET WETHERBEE



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Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. A GREAT UPHEAVAL	7
II. MAENAN GRANGE	16
III. AN ARRIVAL	33
IV. FORM-MATES	47
V. LEGENDS OF THE PAST	56
VI. A SURPRISE	71
VII. SUNNY JUNE	85
VIII. STRANGE HAPPENINGS	97
IX. ACROSS THE BORDER	110
X. AMONG THE PREFECTS	126
XI. WET DAYS	137
XII. A DISCOVERY	150
XIII. MERRY-GO-ROUND	159
XIV. A CYCLE TOUR	176
XV. A STRANGE FIND	190
XVI. MIXED PICKLES	205
XVII. THE DRUMMING WELL	220

	<i>Page</i>
XVIII. AN UNWELCOME ARRIVAL	232
XIX. A RED CROSS FÊTE	247
XX. A LONE PLANE	261

THE MYSTERY OF THE MOATED GRANGE

CHAPTER I

A Great Upheaval

It was a cold, gusty evening in mid-March, the wind howled round the house, rattling doors, and sending occasional showers of rain pattering against the panes. Not at all a pleasant night for anyone to be out. Indoors, however, the Bevan family was sitting round a cosy, blazing fire, much too occupied with their immediate concerns to take great notice of the elements. Here they all were, for one last precious hour united and together, Captain Bevan, Mrs. Bevan, Arthur aged fourteen, Marian aged thirteen, and Hilda, just eleven. Captain Bevan had been home for a week on leave, but in a very short time a taxi would whisk him away to the station, where he must catch a night train to rejoin his regiment, and then—goodness knew when they would see him again. Though it had been delightful to have him, his short leave had been somewhat of a disappointment to his three children. He had been obliged to go up to London so often “on urgent business”, and this very Saturday afternoon, when he

8 Mystery of the Moated Grange

had promised to take them to the Hippodrome, he had again paid a final visit to town "to see his solicitor", and they had been obliged to go to the performance without him. Too bad that, they all agreed. But he had returned in time for supper, a very special supper, in spite of rationing, quite a festive occasion and as good as a birthday party. And now they all sat round the cheery blaze, watching "faces in the fire", and trying not to notice the clock that ticked solemnly on. A big piece of coal falling from the grate on to the hearth made Marian start.

"Doesn't that mean a change?" she challenged.

"Yes, if you're superstitious, but I'm not!" replied her brother, with scorn in his voice.

"Can the fire tell fortunes?" asked Hilda.

"Of course not, silly!" squashed Arthur.

But their mother was looking earnestly at her husband.

"Isn't it time you told them?" she inquired.

"Told us *what*?" demanded three voices at once.

Captain Bevan threw the end of his cigarette into the fire, glanced at his watch, cleared his throat, and began to talk rather fast.

"Well, bairns, you've heard me speak sometimes of my Uncle Tristram, who lived at Maenan Grange in Herefordshire——"

"I thought he was dead!" put in Arthur.

"Yes, he died two years ago, and the old house has been empty ever since. Well, the fact is—you and your mother are going to live there."

"What!"

"Leave here?"

"Leave this house?"

"Exactly what I say. This house will shortly be let furnished, and you will all remove to Maenan Grange almost at once."

"Evacuated?" gasped Hilda.

"If you call it evacuation."

"Has the Grange been left to *you* then, Dad?" asked Arthur.

"In a sense, yes. It's certainly a piece of luck for us. It's a lovely ancient place, with a moat round it, our family has owned it for hundreds of years."

"Quite in the country?" asked Marian.

"Absolutely. It's in the west of Herefordshire just on the Welsh border, and four miles from the nearest town."

"Then we needn't go to school!" rejoiced Hilda.

"Don't flatter yourself. School will come to you instead. You tell them about that, Mother, while I have another cig."

Three eager interested faces turned to Mrs. Bevan as she took up the story.

"The education authorities are evacuating sixty girls and some of the staff from a large school in a blitzed city to Maenan Grange. It's a big old house, so there'll be plenty of room. You two girls can join the classes, and I'm to be warden."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Marian, utterly staggered by such an announcement. "Then we're leaving the 'High' here?"

"That's inevitable."

"Will it be a sort of boarding school then?" asked Hilda, "only in our own house?"

"Exactly!"

10 Mystery of the Moated Grange

“But look here, what about *me*?” broke in Arthur. “I’m surely not to be boxed up with a tribe of girls? It’s unthinkable!”

“No, you’re to go to the Grammar School at Leomford, four miles away, where a number of boys from another school are being evacuated. You and about a dozen other boys will be billeted at the Abbey Farm which is close to the Grange.”

Arthur heaved a sigh of genuine relief.

“That’s better! But rather an upheaval, isn’t it? When do we go on this sudden trek? You make my brain whirl. Dad, *do* explain!”

“You’ll start in about a week,” continued his father, “because your mother must get the Grange in order for the school, and also a tenant is ready to take on this house. You’ll all go to Maenan, have your Easter holiday there, and then begin these new school arrangements. I’m sorry in a way to take you from your present schools, but Axleford’s too near London to be safe, and I’ll feel far happier to think of you in the country and away from the danger of raids, especially to know you’re in the old family home that has been ours for generations.”

“It’s *yours* now, isn’t it, Daddy?” asked Hilda expectantly.

“Well, in a certain sense,” evaded her father.

“But surely it must be,” she persisted.

Captain Bevan looked at his watch.

“No time for another cig! I believe I hear the taxi. Are you ready, Mother?”

“Oh, *can’t* we come with you to the station?” clamoured all three.

"No, I've told you so before. Mother will see me off. I'll say good-bye to you here. Well, the Grange is an adventure for you, and I hope you'll all be happy there, bairns! Yes, that *is* the taxi. I hear the bell. Help your mother on with her coat, Marian. Keep up the credit of the family at Maenan and write and tell me all about everything. Good-bye! Good-bye! Don't make me miss my train! Good-bye!"

Escaping from last affectionate hugs Captain Bevan plunged down the steps and into the taxi, where his wife was already seated. His children ran to the gate and stood waving frantically till the driver turned the corner of the road and the motor passed out of sight. Then they went back to the cosy fireside and began to talk about the very great and unexpected future that was opening out before them.

"Well, what do you think of it?" queried Arthur.

"I like the idea of the house, but I'm not so sure I want the school there!" said Marian, wrinkling up her forehead.

"I think that may be rather fun!" twinkled Hilda, sitting on the hearthrug and poking the fire to make fresh faces in it. "I always said I'd like to go to a boarding school and yet I said I didn't want to leave home, but when it's both combined and Mums thrown into the bargain, well, it seems to me jolly good!"

Arthur, who was occupying his father's chair, leaned back and crossed his legs, and replied slowly.

"Um—yes. But there's something queer about the whole thing if you ask me."

"Queer! What d'you mean?" said Marian sharply.

"I mean what I say. Didn't you notice how Dad

12 Mystery of the Moated Grange

shuffled out of telling us much about it? He left it till the very last minute, and did a bolt when we began to ask questions."

"So he did! Well?"

"Well—you know he scurried up to town this afternoon to see his solicitor."

"Instead of taking us to the Hippodrome. Am I likely to forget?" nodded Hilda.

"Go on, Artie," urged Marian.

"As I was saying, he went to London," continued Arthur, "and when he came back I was half-way down the stairs as he opened the front door, and the Mater rushed into the hall to meet him and she said, 'Well? Have you done it?' And he said, 'Yes, it's a big gamble, but I've signed,' and she said, 'So that's that!' and then they both went into the dining-room and slammed the door."

"A gamble! What did he mean?" frowned Marian.

"That's what I should like to know. I told you it sounded queer—uncommonly queer. Why should going to live at Maenan Grange be a gamble of all things in this world, if the old house is our family home. I can't understand it."

Arthur shook his head and glanced at his sisters with the gratifying feeling that he had aroused their intense interest. Hilda was staring at him round-eyed, and put in her oar.

"Now you speak of it, I remember something queer too. I'd quite forgotten all about it till this minute. A few days ago Dad went to London, and when he got back he and Mummie came into the drawing-room, and I was sitting on the floor behind the sofa,

reading *What Katy Did*. I suppose they didn't see me, at any rate they began talking. I wasn't listening at first. Then I heard Dad say something about 'the old Grange', and Mummie said 'it would be a safe and healthy place for the children at any rate', and at that I pricked up my ears as you can imagine. And Dad said 'Where did the old man get his money? It beats me! And what became of William? Well at any rate it's a venture. Shall I risk it?' I jumped up and said, 'Risk what, Dad?' They both looked absolutely flabbergasted when they saw me. 'I didn't know you were there, child!' said Mummie. And Dad frowned and said, 'Little pitchers have long ears—it's no concern of yours. Off you go. Scoot!' And he chivied me out of the room, and slammed the door behind me. Well, what do you make of that?"

"I think it certainly shows there's some mystery about it," ruminated Arthur.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Marian.

"But what?"

"Ah, ask me a harder."

"Let's ask Mums when she comes in."

"If she'll tell us."

"You ought to go to bed, Hilda!"

"Shan't! Not till Mummie comes back."

As all speculation for the present seemed futile the three young people sat watching the fire and lost in their own reflections for some time, till at last the sound of a latch key was heard in the front door, and their mother came in.

"What, still up!" she said as she entered the room.

"Well, I saw Dad off safely. Poor dear, he was

14 Mystery of the Moated Grange

reluctant to leave us all. Hilda, you ought to be in bed! Just look at the time. The dustman's in your eyes."

"No, no, Mummie, I'm wide awake, I am truly. Do sit down. We want to talk to you."

Arthur, who had vacated the big arm-chair, pointed to it ingratiatingly.

"Squattez-vous, Madame!" he suggested.

Mrs. Bevan seated herself a trifle unwillingly, and Hilda, curled up on the hearthrug, leaned against her knee.

"Now, Mums," began Marian. "Do tell us some more about Maenan Grange. It's a big surprise and we're rather knocked flat. Have you ever been there?"

"No, never. Dad stayed there occasionally when he was a boy, but his Uncle Tristram was very eccentric and grew more and more of a hermit, and saw none of his relations as time went on. I understand it's a beautiful old house, though rather neglected. Plenty of room there for a school."

"Why are we having the school?"

"Partly because the education authorities have billeted it at the Grange, and we're obliged by law, and partly for economy."

"Economy?"

"Yes, how do you suppose Dad could keep up a big place like that on his army pay?"

"Isn't there money left him as well as the house?" questioned Arthur.

"The whole affair is very complicated, and I can't possibly explain it. All I can say is that we're going there. We shall start in a week. And I shall have a

tremendously busy time packing what we need to take with us, and leaving this house in order for Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, who are renting it furnished."

"Are we to go to school on Monday?" asked Hilda.

"Yes, you must go for this last week, then you'll begin your holidays rather earlier than usual, and you can help me to get installed at Maenan before the next term starts. There'll be plenty to do. Sixty girls sounds a big order. And I believe there are hens, and a garden to 'dig for victory'. You'll like that part of it. But we shall have to find out everything when we arrive there."

"But is Dad really——"

"No more questions please!" said Mrs. Bevan firmly. "I've told you quite enough and you must all go to bed. Yes, Hilda, I mean it."

Reluctantly the family rose from the fireside. So much seemed to have happened since supper-time. Dad was gone again, and a great change in their lives was impending.

"There *is* a mystery!" whispered Marian, as the three walked upstairs.

"You bet there is. I told you so!" replied Arthur.

"Mums won't say!"

"No, close as a clam about it."

"I wonder what it is?"

"That we'll have to find out for ourselves."

"Oh, how?"

"I can't tell you. We shall see when we get there. We must keep our eyes open."

"Are you glad we're going?"

"Yes, on the whole. I shall miss the footer match,

16 Mystery of the Moated Grange

but that can't be helped. As Dad says it's an adventure. Don't know what my new school will be like of course. If it's in a town four miles off I must take my bike."

"And we must take ours, Hilda and I. It will be grand fun exploring the neighbourhood. You're to stay at a farm near the Grange?"

"Yes, a farm will just suit me. I've a hankering to go on the land."

"Go to bed, children!" shouted a voice from the hall below.

"Yes, yes, we're going! Good night!" Marian called back.

"Well, it's some stunt," whispered Arthur. "Something to dream about at any rate," as he closed his bedroom door.

CHAPTER II

Maenan Grange

Maenan Grange, the new home so unexpectedly opened to the Bevan family, was a large old house in that part of Herefordshire known as the Marches, on the very border of Wales. In ancient days the district had been a centre of continual strife between Saxon and Celt, and in mediæval times Norman strongholds had been erected where Lords of the Marches resisted the numerous attacks of the Welsh on the then debatable borderland. The Grange had originally been one of these small fortresses, though only a portion

of a keep remained, incorporated into a more peaceable dwelling of later date, which had accumulated additions during successive centuries. It was now a long grey stone building, the interior rich in Elizabethan paneling and decorated plaster work, and though somewhat dilapidated and neglected was still a very fine example of one of the former "stately homes of England". It was partly surrounded by a moat, and by terraced gardens, also by fields and woods, and the view towards the west, with its vista of Welsh mountains, was extremely beautiful. Except for neighbouring farms, and a tiny hamlet too small to be called a village, it stood isolated in the country, four miles from the market town of Leomford.

For more than four hundred years the Grange and its surrounding property had belonged to the Bevan family, but, though in former days they had held a position of some consequence in the county, their fortunes had steadily declined till by the time Tristram Bevan became owner the small estate was in an impoverished condition. The farms were all mortgaged, their rents bringing in little more than the payments due to the mortgagees, and Tristram Bevan ran his own home farm to make a living. He had one only child, a son William, whose mother died early, and as soon as the lad could leave school he had forced him to work on the farm, keeping him toiling for long hours and paying him no wages. William had rebelled hotly, and after a violent quarrel with his father he had run away from home, no one knew where, though it was rumoured that he had gone to Canada. Tristram Bevan refused to have his name mentioned again, and

18 Mystery of the Moated Grange

no more was heard of him. He seemed to have utterly and entirely disappeared.

For some years after his son had left him Tristram struggled on with his farm, which was generally on the brink of bankruptcy. Then to the amazement of the neighbourhood he seemed suddenly to become possessed of money, though from what source no one could even surmise. At any rate he repaid the mortgages, and did some repairs to the old house, and to the various farms, improved the land and replaced broken gates and fences, all of which involved considerable expenditure. By this time his natural reticence had developed into such secretiveness that he took nobody into his confidence, and became more and more morose and solitary, and gained the reputation of an eccentric hermit, whom none of his neighbours could approach. The least allusion to his affairs was answered with gruff resentment. When he died he left an extraordinary will.

By the terms of this last testament the whole of his property was placed in the hands of trustees, who were directed to advertise for his son William or his son's heirs. If at the close of two years no reply had been received to these advertisements, Maenan Grange was to be offered to his nephew Denis Bevan on the following stipulations, namely that he should take up residence at the Grange, the Trust to allow him £200 a year for the maintenance of the house, but that he must be prepared at any time to give up the Grange to William Bevan or his heirs, should such appear. Should, however, proof be forthcoming of the death of William Bevan without heirs, the Grange with its

contents scheduled or unscheduled, and the whole of the Trust money to revert to Denis Bevan if he had already signed the stipulated agreement, but if he had refused to do so or had broken the aforesaid stipulations, the entire property was to be left among certain enumerated charities.

The solicitor for the Trust, having advertised in British and Colonial newspapers for William Bevan, for the period of two years prescribed, without any results, had now communicated with Captain Denis Bevan. He was immensely surprised at the bequest, but saw so many objections that he hesitated to accept it. To begin with, being in the army for the duration of the war would render his residence at the Grange impossible. Even afterwards when he was demobilized he could not live there and carry on his former business, while the £200 a year allowed by the Trust would be totally insufficient to keep up the Grange and support and educate his family. Further he might at any future time be required to give up the property to William Bevan or his heirs, should they appear, and thus be left himself without occupation or money. He was therefore decidedly of the opinion that it would be impossible to accept such an offer.

The solicitor, however, advanced other arguments. He said that Captain Bevan's position in the army during the war was the first claim on him, and would absolve him from personally living at the Grange, and it would suffice for the Trust if his wife and children were to take up residence there. That for two years his firm had advertised extensively for William Bevan, with no result, and that if proof of his death without

20 Mystery of the Moated Grange

heirs could be obtained, then Captain Bevan would be entitled to the whole property. He described it as a gamble, but strongly advised his client to risk signing the agreement, as failure to do so would mean giving up any chance of the legacy involved. To ease the present situation meanwhile, if Mrs. Bevan and her children would go to live at Maenan Grange the Education Committee was anxious to rent the house for the purpose of evacuating part of a High School for Girls from a blitzed area, and would send some sixty girls and some teachers to reside there, and would offer Mrs. Bevan the post of warden, at a salary to be arranged.

Captain Bevan had discussed the matter fully with his wife, and she had agreed that it would be foolish to lose such an opportunity. There was of course the risk that William Bevan or his heirs might turn up, but on the other hand they might not, and anyhow, as the solicitor said, it was a "gamble", and worth the experiment. She herself was quite prepared to accept the post of warden at the Grange and entertain the school there. Before her marriage she had had a domestic science training and had filled a post where she had catered for large numbers, so she felt capable of managing for an average of seventy, even in the depths of the country and in war-time. The Education Committee would see to it that rations were adequate for the school. She was only forty-one, still very capable and energetic, and she welcomed the prospect partly as a war job, and partly to take the children into the country, and above all to have the chance of living in the old family home of the Bevans and possibly possessing it ultimately as their own.

She and her husband agreed that it was wiser not to reveal to the young people the strange stipulations of the will. They could not be trusted to keep the news to themselves. They would be sure to talk about it, and spread unwelcome gossip in the neighbourhood and also in the school. It was quite unnecessary for them to be acquainted with their parents' business affairs, and enough for them to know that they were going to leave Axleford and live at Maenan. How much they guessed or speculated about the change was of no consequence. Mrs. Bevan was quite equal to evading all questions, and expected it would soon fade from their memory in the excitement of the removal. That they did not forget so easily was a matter on which she had not calculated, and which involved more events than she imagined.

A week was a very short time for Mrs. Bevan to prepare her own house for the tenant who was renting it furnished, and to pack up all the various belongings that they must take to Maenan Grange. She had the help, however, of Annie, a trustworthy maid who volunteered to go with them for a few weeks and see them installed in the new home, before she returned and took up some munition work.

The young people, after bidding hasty good-byes to their surprised schoolfellows, collected any treasures their mother would allow them to take, and the rest of what Annie termed "the family rubbish" was stored in the attic to be out of the way of Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, who would certainly not care to be embarrassed with an ancient rocking-horse, a dilapidated dolls' house, broken Meccano, an assortment

22 Mystery of the Moated Grange

of children's annuals, and other bygone nursery relics, which might have been passed on to some Children's Home had there been time to do so, and would have been given away long ago had their owners not sentimentally clung to them.

At last everything was sorted out, the house arranged and left in good order, and on Monday morning all was ready for the great trek. Mrs. Bevan, Arthur, Marian and Hilda rode their bicycles to the station, Annie went in the taxi with the numerous articles of luggage, while Mrs. Jackson, the new tenant, who had just received the key of the house, stood on the steps and wished them good luck.

It was a tedious journey, because there were several changes and the trains were slow, and there was a long wait at the junction, but late in the afternoon they reached Leomford, which was the nearest station for Maenan. Here the family again mounted their bicycles, and having secured a taxi for Annie and the luggage, told the chauffeur to drive slowly to the Grange, and they would follow his car, as they did not yet know the way.

They cycled therefore through the streets of an old-fashioned market town and soon found themselves on a country road bordered by trees, hardly yet in bud, and hedgerows already showing yellow celandines and actually a few primroses.

The car seemed to scurry along much faster than they could cycle, but the driver mercifully halted at every cross-road and gave them time to catch him up, so that they should not miss him and take a wrong turning by any mischance. The four miles were soon

covered and at length they reached some great iron gates that stood open, and passing up a long drive caught their first glimpse of the Grange. There it stood, a long grey stone house, its windows reflected in the moat that partly surrounded it. Originally no doubt there had been a drawbridge, but now a firm stone bridge crossed the water and led to the front door. The driver drew up and sounded his horn, and an elderly woman came out on to the steps.

"Mrs. Griffiths? You got my letter all right?" asked Mrs. Bevan.

"Yes, I've made ready for you as well as I could," replied the woman, rather gruffly, "but you'll understand it was short notice and I've not had overmuch time for preparations. I'm afraid you must take things as you find them."

"Oh, of course, I understand," replied Mrs. Bevan. "I know you must have been terribly hurried. Where shall we put our bicycles? In the hall here? If the kettle's boiling we're all just longing for some tea."

"You can have that at once, if you've brought your own rations. I've got bread for you, and some milk as you asked me in your letter. Shall I boil you each an egg?"

"The rations are here in this basket—Annie will go with you to the kitchen. Yes, please, we should like eggs."

"Go in there to the dining-room then, while I boil 'em and mash the tea. I'll show you upstairs after. Here—you—come along with me!" beckoning to Annie and leading the way to the kitchen.

24 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Having stacked their cycles in the hall they entered a room to the left, a large room with panelled walls that had been painted and were now a faded green. There was a good view out of the mullioned window across the moat, and the evening sun shone in cheerily.

"Who's the grumpy old soul who welcomed—or rather did *not* welcome us?" asked Arthur.

"Mrs. Griffiths, the wife of the gardener," explained his mother. "She and her husband have acted as caretakers since Uncle Tristram died."

"She didn't look too pleased to see us, I must say."

"Well, I expect she doesn't like the idea of a school arriving here soon. She's had charge of the house for two years, so it will be a great change for her. Perhaps she'll cheer up soon."

"I'm glad the table's laid!" said Marian.

"Yes, I'm fearfully hungry," agreed Hilda.

"Same here!" endorsed Arthur. "Hope the tea will come in quick!"

They waited impatiently, staring out of the window, till at last Mrs. Griffiths returned with the tray.

"I shall have to take our ration books to the Food Office at Leomford to-morrow. Can you tell me where it is?" asked Mrs. Bevan.

"Opposite the town hall in the market square," replied Mrs. Griffiths briefly. "Now have you got all you want? I've given your maid her tea in the kitchen. Ring the bell when you've finished and I'll come and show you upstairs."

As well as the eggs she had provided a pot of jam, which was certainly a concession in days of war-time

jam rationing, and the children remarked upon it joyfully. The ghost of a smile flickered round her grim mouth.

"Yes, those are last year's raspberries from the garden, when I had an allowance of sugar for jam," she explained. "We had a good crop of fruit. You'll find a few pots in the larder. It won't last long I'll be bound."

"We'd better finish it before the school comes!" giggled Hilda.

"School! Humph! I suppose billeting's billeting nowadays, and you've got to take what the government sends you or stand a fine. Still, what the old house will be like cluttered up with a schoolful of girls passes me altogether!"

"We must remember it's war-time and many schools have to be evacuated. It's difficult to find places to send them to," remarked Mrs. Bevan.

Mrs. Griffiths' reply was a low grumble as she made her exit from the room, the words were indistinguishable, but the meaning was obvious. She had evidently no use for evacuees.

When they had finished tea she returned and showed them over the house. They had expected a fine place but it quite exceeded their anticipations. Though it had been neglected for many years, and paint was scratched and wallpapers faded, it had been thoroughly cleaned and the furniture polished. The front was comparatively modern, that is to say it dated probably from the reign of Queen Anne, and the panelled sitting-rooms had large windows that let in plenty of light and air. In the centre of the house was

26 Mystery of the Moated Grange

a spacious hall, built in Elizabethan times, with timbered walls, and a wonderful ceiling on which were designs in plaster work of dragons, coats-of-arms, lions, crowns, and other heraldic devices. A great oak staircase led up to long passages and a number of bedrooms, and a smaller staircase to yet another corridor of rooms situated over the kitchen premises, and seemingly more ancient than the rest, as some of them had timbered walls and plaster work ceilings the same as in the hall. Only a few of the bedrooms were furnished, but that did not matter as the school was to send its own equipment. For the present there was sufficient accommodation for the family.

The furniture, such as it was, was ancient, oak chests of drawers, walnut cupboards, canopied beds, and in the big hall some really fine carved oak dressers, banqueting tables and arm-chairs. There were a few dingy oil paintings, and some sporting prints in frames of tarnished gilt, an array of pewter plates and some old weapons. There were hardly any ornaments, and the general appearance suggested that for many years no mistress had been there to put a feminine touch to the rooms or place any pretty things about.

"Perhaps it's just as well, since it's destined to be a school," commented Mrs. Bevan. "We can make it look attractive with bowls of flowers. I suppose the blackout is arranged for?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Griffiths. "Two ladies came from the school last week to see over the place. They wrote down a lot of things in notebooks, about the beds and such like they'd have to send. They arranged with Morcoms, the furniture shop in Leomford, to

do the blackout at once. A man came yesterday and measured all the windows. They'll be bringing the blinds before long."

At mention of the school Mrs. Griffiths' face had again resumed the aspect of one who has swallowed vinegar, and her voice was harsh.

Mrs. Bevan had looked at the few furnished bedrooms and picked out one with a cheerful south aspect, which had a smaller room leading from it; as, at any rate temporary, owner of the Grange, she intended to make her own choice before the school arrived.

"I'll have this one, and my little girls can sleep in the one next to it," she observed.

"Yes, those two ladies fancied it, so if you want it you'd best get settled in before they come!" grunted Mrs. Griffiths. "I'll tell my husband to carry up your luggage here. What about the young gentleman?"

"Oh, for the present he can sleep in one of the other rooms, but he's to be sent to the Abbey Farm when the school arrives."

"Yes, I did hear the Abbey was to have boys billeted on them."

It was too dark that evening to explore outside, but next morning they all made a tour of the grounds. The neglected flower garden was much overgrown with weeds, but it contained lilac bushes and laburnums and rose trees that would bloom later, and already there were daffodils, and a bed of violets under an ivied wall, and other little spring blossoms peeping up. Compared with their small suburban patch at Axleford it seemed a delightful wilderness with end-

28 Mystery of the Moated Grange

less possibilities. The kitchen garden had been kept in better order, and there were gooseberry and raspberry and currant bushes, the remains of winter vegetables and beds dug up for spring planting. In a warm sheltered corner stood a row of beehives. Each had a tattered piece of black crepe tied on it, that fluttered in the breeze.

“What’s that for?” asked Hilda in much curiosity.

“Probably in mourning for Uncle Tristram,” said Mrs. Bevan. “It’s an old country superstition that when the owner dies the bees must be told, and some black fastened to their hives, otherwise they will fly away.”

“Would they really?”

“That I can’t tell you. We shall be sure to come across many of these quaint old-world customs now we are here. I find them very interesting. I’ve always longed to keep bees, but I never had an opportunity. You must have plenty of flowers near for them.”

“Mums, you’re smiling! I believe you’re going to like the Grange?”

“I believe I shall love it!”

“As for me, I feel like ‘Mariana in the Moated Grange’,” observed Marian, rather triumphantly. “Did you christen me Marian as a sort of presentiment? Did you guess we might come to live here some day?”

Mrs. Bevan shook her head.

“Certainly not. I never had the least idea of such a possibility. You were named after my mother—who wasn’t a Bevan, of course. Tennyson’s Mariana pined away in her Moated Grange, so it’s not a parallel

at all. You're going to grow strong here, not pine."

"I saw a funny parody on that!" chuckled Arthur.

"Within her lonely Moated Grange
She pined, and pined, her cheeks grew thinner,
At last at long long last he came,
'Hello!' he cried, 'and what's for dinner?'"

Not exactly romantic, Marian old girl! Are you imagining yourself the heroine of a poem."

"Don't be horrid," pouted Marian. "Besides modern girls don't pine! Do they, Mummie?"

"They'd be a great deal more likely to take cookery lessons while their swains were away at the war and be able to give them good dinners when they came back!" said Mrs. Bevan briskly. "Do I hear hens clucking over there? I believe that must be a poultry yard. Let's come along and see."

It certainly was a stableyard, with hens and ducks, and a pig-sty at the end, which contained several grunting occupants.

"Quite a farm!" said Arthur, with much satisfaction. "We'll be able to have our own bacon and eggs."

"And a cow?" inquired Hilda. "That's my ambition. Artie may keep the pigs. I'll be the milk-maid."

"It was Rousseau's ambition, poor man!" murmured Mrs. Bevan contemplatively.

"Who's Rousseau?" asked Hilda.

"He was a French writer," whispered Marian, as her mother took no notice.

"Yes, poor man," Mrs. Bevan continued, "he

30 Mystery of the Moated Grange

longed for a country cottage and an amiable wife and a cow. He secured the cottage, but the wife was not amiable and she brought her mother with her and there was no cow!"

"Oh!" said Hilda, on whom this allusion to French classics was entirely lost. "Well, Mummie, let's buy a cow. I could do with a drink of milk now if you asked me."

"We'll go indoors and see if Mrs. Griffiths has any. Hungry already? This country air must be doing you good. I told Dad it would be the making of you all."

After an early dinner Mrs. Bevan announced that she must go into Leomford to take their ration books to the Food Office. Naturally Arthur, Marian and Hilda wished to go too, so they all set off on their bicycles, congratulating themselves that they had that mode of transport, for there was no bus, and a four-mile walk there and back was not too desirable. While their mother arranged matters in the Food Office the young folks waited outside, and Arthur, with much curiosity, inspected the exterior of the Grammar School, round the corner, which he was shortly to attend. He shook his head dubiously, and declared it did not appear to come up to the standard of his previous school.

"Well, you can't have everything!" remarked Marian virtuously. "If we live in the country we have to put up with country ways, specially in war-time. What about Hilda and me? We've no idea what this school's going to be like that's coming to the Grange. At any rate *you* won't *live* in a school."

"No, thank goodness!" murmured Arthur.

Mrs. Bevan emerged at last from the Food Office, having successfully performed her business, and suggested that they should take a stroll round the town. So, wheeling their cycles, they wended their way along many quite picturesque streets, some with black-and-white timbered houses and shops with old-fashioned bow windows. There was a chemist's that still retained great glass bottles of red, blue and green, recalling the time-honoured story of "Rosamund and the Purple Jar" and the bitter disappointment of that luckless damsel, when her stern mamma, to teach her a lesson, allowed her to buy it and she made the tragic discovery that it was only full of tinted water, whereupon mamma improved the occasion, as did parents of her century, by discoursing on the vanity of judging by outward appearances. There was a ruined castle, the courtyard of which was turned into a public garden, with flower beds and seats, and a small ornamental pond, and then a quaint, though rather dilapidated street led to the river.

They stood on the bridge for some time, watching the water flowing slowly through the arches. There was a charm about it, as it swirled past, coming from somewhere up in the Welsh hills, and wandering along to join itself to some greater tributary till it finally merged with the sea.

There were portions of the old town wall, battered down by Cromwell's army, near the bank of the river, and on the farther side an attractive promenade, where tall trees, not yet in leaf, sheltered a broad walk, and where in summer time no doubt the population of

32 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Leomford paraded on Sundays. On the whole they decided it was a pleasant town, utterly different from the modern suburb where they had lived before, and if not so well equipped with shops, certainly scoring on the side of the picturesque.

"I feel as if I've gone back centuries since I arrived yesterday!" vouchsafed Marian.

"I feel as if we'd left the war behind!" declared Arthur.

"Don't imagine we can do that," corrected his mother. "The country has its part to play just as much as cities where munitions are made. If you do some work on the land you'll be taking your share of winning the war."

"If only I could join the air force!" sighed Arthur, watching a plane whiz across the sky.

"All in good time, my man! You must pass your school certificate before you can begin to train for anything. And meanwhile you can 'dig for victory'. No doubt they'll offer you plenty of jobs on the farm."

"And *we'll* dig in the garden?" urged Hilda.

"Yes, we must all be ready to help to grow food. That will be our responsibility to the nation."

Feeling immensely patriotic at the idea they turned their bicycles from off the bridge, wheeled them up the steep hill to the market square, then mounting them set off for Maenan Grange, with the glad sensation that they were returning to their both new and old home.

CHAPTER III

An Arrival

While the Bevan family were settling themselves at Maenan Grange there was great excitement at a large High School in Ashmont, a city which had suffered severely in a recent air raid. The gymnasium and library had been blitzed, and there was a big crater in the tennis ground, and though the rest of the premises were only slightly damaged and classes could be carried on there, the governors, with co-operation of the Board of Education, had decided to evacuate as many of the girls as possible. Those who remained would do so at their parents' own risk. Some of the fathers and mothers preferred to keep their children at home, but others were glad to avail themselves of the opportunity of sending them to a safe area, and there were many applications in response to the circulars posted to them by the school authorities.

Owing to the difficulty of finding suitable premises it had been arranged to evacuate the "over fifteens" in charge of the headmistress, and the younger ones, aged about eleven to fifteen, to a different place under the care of a second mistress and several teachers. For this junior portion sixty-two names had been entered and they were informed that their destination, when the new term commenced after the holidays, would be at Maenan Grange in the county of Herefordshire. A certain number of IVA, assembling in their

34 Mystery of the Moated Grange

classroom one afternoon, discussed the matter with energy.

"How many of our form are going?" asked Florence.

"Eleven of us, I believe," said Nora. "I know Enid and Janie and Alison and Freda, at any rate, and some of IVB, and a lot of the kids."

"Any seniors?"

"Some of VB, I'm told, but VA and the School Cert. ones and the Sixth are to go with Miss Lancaster."

"Who's to shepherd *us*?"

"Miss Brookes!"

"Oh!"

"She's not so bad on the whole," put in Ethel, "I'd rather have her than Miss Humphreys."

"But Miss Humphreys is going too!"

"No! Is she? I wish I'd asked to stay at home!"

"Well, you can't change now at any rate."

"It will be rather an adventure," suggested Muriel.

"Yes, I like the idea of a Moated Grange," agreed Bessie.

"Who said it was moated?"

"I don't know. Somebody certainly did. Someone who'd motored in the neighbourhood. Said it was a very old house, in the depths of the country."

"It sounds attractive," ruminated Nora.

"I guess it will turn out to be something like camping."

"We shall have the summer term there."

"Do we sleep in tents?"

"No, goosey! It's a big house, I tell you."

"Big enough for over sixty of us?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, for one, I'm looking forward to it."

"So am I, so long as we're all together."

"I wish Patty was going, but her father won't let her."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Can't she wangle him?"

"She says not."

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped, but she's a sport."

"Yes, I'd have liked Patty with us."

"Perhaps at the eleventh hour her dad will repent."

"He'll have to make up his mind quickly then, for there's only room for a certain number of us."

"My dad applied the very day the circular came. He said it was the very thing for Doris and me."

"Hello! Talk of the angels! Here's Patty!"

"Patty, old sport, we're just lamenting you're not going with us to this old Grange."

"But I am!"

"What, after all? I thought you said your father was firm as nails about it."

"He was at first, but he called to see Miss Lancaster last night and she persuaded him."

"Oh, good biz! Aren't you glad?"

"Rather. I always wanted to go."

"Well, hurrah for the jolly old set. We're all to be evacs!"

"It's very well for you," complained a girl who had just joined them. "*You* may like it, but I know *I* shan't. I shall be most fearfully homesick."

"Nonsense, Freda, you won't!"

"I know I shall," continued the melancholy voice;

36 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"I always am when I'm away from home. When I stay at my aunt's I'm miserable the whole time."

"Well, you're not going to your aunt's now, you're going to a lovely old hall, with a moat round it."

"Are there any ghosts?"

"Ghosts? I don't suppose so. Rather fun if there are! Come, cheer up! We'll keep you lively."

"A fine if you turn on the water-works. A penny for every tear. Proceeds for the Red Cross!" mocked Patty.

"Can I take my bicycle?"

"Yes, you can. Miss Lancaster said any girl who has a bike had better bring it, as the town is four miles away. We'll have a cycle club and go excursions."

"Well, perhaps it won't be quite so bad after all."

The girls were not the only ones who discussed the forthcoming evacuation. In the staff room three teachers were equally absorbed in plans for the future. Miss Brookes, who was to fill the post of head mistress, was in her thirties, capable, a good disciplinarian but with a human side, used to secretarial work, and fortunately fond of the country. She considered it a golden opportunity to have this offer of a headship, and likely to lead to promotion afterwards. She felt she would be like a general, marshalling her little army of girls and training them in her own ways. The Grange was to be her ideal boarding school, where she could try out psychological methods such as she had lately studied at an educational conference, and for which there had been small chance to experiment at a day school.

If Miss Brookes was regarding the Grange as an

ultra-modern boarding school, Miss Gerrard, the physical culture and games mistress, was viewing it as a camp. She was still in her twenties, most energetic, fond of fresh air, and ready for any amount of exercise. She visualized showing her pupils how to dig for Victory, to tend poultry and bees, to help in the hay-field, and to qualify themselves as land girls. It was a war job which intrigued her and for which she felt completely fitted.

Miss Laxon, also young and certificated as a teacher of domestic science, was scheming how, in the probable absence of servants at the Grange, she could organize relays of girls to perform necessary domestic duties, which must undoubtedly fall to their share. Like Miss Gerrard she had been camping, and understood the need for strict discipline in those matters, to prevent the willing performing all the tasks while the idle ones managed to shirk. She was triumphing at the moment as she had persuaded a friend, who had been at the same training college, to accept the post of lady cook at the Grange.

The fourth teacher, Miss Humphries, was to take with Miss Brookes most of the purely scholastic work, and though she looked forward to being in the country, the change of environment involved the same round of classes in history, geography, mathematics and other subjects, which she taught professionally, and without enthusiasm. In her heart of hearts she was not really fond of girls, and would have joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force if it had not been for an invalid mother, whom she was bound to help to support out of her salary from school.

38 Mystery of the Moated Grange

These four mistresses, who were to form the staff at Maenan Grange, drew up time-tables and plans and made many arrangements, as far as things could be foreseen. Miss Brookes and Miss Laxon had actually paid a visit to the house, and submitted to the governors lists of beds, bedding, furniture, kitchen utensils, &c., that would be needed. These were to be purchased at once and sent off in removing vans, and both ladies had heroically promised to give up most of their short Easter holiday to seeing everything installed satisfactorily at the Grange, where Mrs. Bevan was already in residence and prepared to act as warden and do the housekeeping.

At the Grange itself Mrs. Bevan was superintending a final spring cleaning, and presently the equipment began to arrive. There was a holiday for the few days of Eastertide and then Miss Brookes and Miss Laxon joined her, and they all spent a hectic time making the best arrangements they could in the available circumstances.

A boys' school from Ashmont was also being evacuated to Leomford, the pupils being billeted at various places in the neighbourhood, juniors in the town, and elder ones, especially those who possessed bicycles, at country houses and farms. The Abbey Farm, close to Maenan Grange, was to accommodate twenty, with a master in charge. Many of them were to sleep in a large barn where two-tier bunks had been placed, and arrangements were on the lines of a camp.

Arthur, who was to join this contingent, removed to the farm, where he rapidly made friends with Mr. Lowman, the farmer, proffering his services in any way

in which he could help. The open-air life entirely suited him and he wished he need not attend school but only work on the land. Visions of an agricultural college and a career as a farmer floated before him, almost displacing those of an air pilot which he had hitherto cherished. His mother was relieved to have him out of the way during her busy preparations at the Grange, but glad to know he was close at hand. Marian and Hilda spent most of their time in the garden, digging some small beds and planting flowers, helping to feed chickens and waiting in keen expectation for the arrival of the school. They liked Miss Brookes and Miss Laxon and were prepared to welcome the rest.

At last all was ready. The little camp beds were placed in dormitories, long tables and rows of chairs stood in the big hall, and the kitchen was equipped with new utensils required by the lady cook. Two small rooms on the ground floor had been reserved by Mrs. Bevan, one as a warden's room for her own use, and the other as a staff room for the mistresses, thus providing them with some comfortable private quarters to themselves.

The great day of the new term came at last. Miss Brookes and Miss Laxon departed to Leomford to meet an afternoon train, and at five o'clock Mrs. Bevan, Marian and Hilda stood on the steps to welcome the first batch of arrivals. Two buses rumbled up and disgorged a crowd of girls, who were ushered into the hall, then a lorry followed with their luggage, and finally fourteen more girls on bicycles put in their appearance, escorted by Miss Brookes and Miss

40 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Laxon. They all trooped into the big hall, which they surveyed with seemingly gratified astonishment, and remarks were heard such as "Jolly place this!" "Look at the roof! Are those things meant to be dragons?" "It's like a baronial castle!"

Miss Brookes called for silence and made a short speech.

"Now we're all here, girls, I want to introduce Mrs. Bevan, to whom this house belongs, and who is going to act as warden during our stay. I am sure you will want to give her as little trouble as possible and to give as much help as you can. I know we shall enjoy being in this beautiful old home. It is a splendid environment both for our work and recreation, and we expect to have a very happy term. I also want to introduce Mrs. Bevan's two daughters, Marian and Hilda, who are joining the school, so our number will be sixty-four. We'll go upstairs now and show you your dormitories, then the bell will ring for tea and you will return here. Please march out in the order of your forms, IVA going first. Miss Gerrard will lead the way. Just one moment as Mrs. Bevan wants to say a word to you!"

Mrs. Bevan had been waiting for this opportunity.

"I only want to give you a hearty welcome to Maenan Grange. I hope you'll all settle down comfortably, and enjoy the place and the excursions in the neighbourhood which we propose to take. We must all unite in making it a very jolly term. Tea will be ready directly. I'm sure you must be hungry."

Somebody started clapping at this, whether at the welcome expressed or at the prospect of tea was a

divided point, but everyone joined in the applause. The girls cast approving glances at the long tables set out with china, plates of bread and butter, jam, and actually cakes. They filed away in good order to their dormitories, exclaiming again at the quaintness of the oak staircase and the panelled walls.

Marian and Hilda, who had shyly submitted to Miss Brookes' introduction, remained behind, wondering how soon they would possibly get to know any individuals among this tribe of strange companions. It seemed queer to be in their own home and yet in the midst of a new boarding school. When the bell rang for tea they made a nervous bolt to go and sit next to their mother, but Miss Brookes beckoned to them, and disposed each between two schoolfellows at the table. Marian found herself with a flaxen-haired girl named Florence on one side, and a dark-haired Nora on the other.

It was rather an embarrassing situation, especially as they began to talk to one another across her.

"Well, how do you like it?"

"I think it's stunning!"

"How did they manage to get all this cake in war-time?"

"I'm sure I don't know, must have wangled it somehow."

"Jolly good biz then!"

"Pass the bread and butter please!"

Marian felt then it was time to take a lead. After all, she was in a position as hostess. She handed the bread and butter and also the jam, and remarked:

"We're rationed for catering and we can get a

42 Mystery of the Moated Grange

great many things you can't get in private houses. Did you have a long journey here?"

Florence turned a pair of blue eyes upon her.

"Yes, and a very slow one. We waited an hour at some wretched junction. The train was late too."

"Did you all travel together?"

"Yes, Miss Humphries shepherded the whole crowd of us from Ashmont."

"We had reserved carriages," put in Nora.

"Your Miss Brookes seems nice?" ventured Marian.

"Oh, she's well enough, and so is Miss Laxon. By the by, where have *you* been to school? I suppose you *have* been to school before?"

"Yes, of course. At Axleford."

"Boarding school?"

"No, day school. We've only just come to live here ourselves."

"Then it's new to you too?"

"Yes. We've been here a month. My brother's with a school at Leomford, and he's billeted at the Abbey Farm close by."

"Oh, what a joke! So is mine!" burst out Nora.

"*Your* brother?"

"Yes. Part of Ashmont College has been evacuated to Leomford Grammar School, and Peter was told he'd be billeted at an Abbey Farm, because he has a bike and can ride into Leomford. I'm glad to know it's near here."

"Janie's brother will be there too," said Florence.

"How is it you've only just come to live here?" asked Nora.

"The Grange belonged to our uncle and he's dead."

"So it's yours now? Or your father's, of course? I suppose you have a father?"

"Yes, he's in the army."

"Mine's in the Air Force. That's your sister opposite? Looks a jolly kid. More bread and butter, please, yes and some more jam."

The exigencies of hearty appetites put a temporary pause to the conversation. Marian looked across at Hilda and was relieved to find that she also appeared to be making friends with two girls of her own age who sat on either side. Shyness was not usually Hilda's fault, though the invasion of so many strangers had at first appalled her and rendered her tongue-tied. She was chattering away now with apparent unconcern.

When tea was finished it was still light enough to go out, and Miss Brookes suggested that they might like to see the garden, so the whole school went eagerly to explore. Marian lost sight of Florence and Nora in the crowd, but finding two girls looking rather forlorn, she offered to show them round. They accepted thankfully and introduced themselves as Janie and Alison.

Since the Bevans had arrived a month ago spring had come with a burst, and now on 24th April the garden was indeed a show. The beds, nicely weeded, were full of tulips, wallflowers and forget-me-nots, the horse chestnut trees were in blossom, and under them daffodils made a golden mass among the grass. Young rooks were hatched and noisy in their nests, jackdaws were flying round the ivy-covered remains

44 Mystery of the Moated Grange

of the keep, and blackbirds and thrushes were singing their evening carols. It did indeed seem a real welcome to the country.

Alison, who was romantic, sighed with satisfaction. She peered particularly at the moat that lay dark and green around the house, showing deep reflections.

"It's a fairy-tale place!" she remarked. "Or like a novel! You'd fancy anything might happen here, wouldn't you?"

"What sort of things?" inquired Janie.

"I don't know. Are there any ghosts?" Her voice held a note of half delighted, half terrified anticipation.

"We've not seen or heard any!" replied Marian.

"But there probably must be some. There always are in such an old house. Can't you feel an atmosphere about it?"

"I haven't noticed it," said Janie.

"Perhaps you haven't yet, but I have already. It reminds me of that piece of poetry Miss Humphries read us in class, you know—'The Listeners', by Walter de la Mare. It began:

" 'Is anybody there?' said the traveller
Knocking on the moon-lit door,

and it went on

" But only a host of phantom listeners
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight.

It was really spooky. It quite made me creep. You remember, Janie?"

"Yes, I do remember now. But I don't connect it with the Grange."

"Well, I do somehow. I have a kind of feeling there's a mystery about the place. Perhaps I'm rather psychic and can sense it. Is there a mystery, Marian?"

"N-n-o," began Marian, then stopped, because it suddenly occurred to her memory that Arthur had suggested a mystery when they had first heard they were to live at Maenan Grange. In the busy time that followed she had forgotten the matter.

"There *is*!" exclaimed Alison eagerly. "I can see there is! You *know*!"

"I certainly don't know anything about it!"

"I suppose most old houses have legends," surmised Janie.

"Well, we must get to know if there are any about the Grange," continued Alison with renewed ardour. "Surely there must be some ancient retainer who knows the stories of the place. Who has lived here?"

"There's only Mrs. Griffiths," gasped Marian. "The one who carried in the urns at tea."

"That grim old thing?" queried Janie.

"Yes, *she* won't tell us anything, I'm sure. She's most annoyed at the school coming. She's close as an oyster."

"Then we must try and find someone else who will. I'm determined to know all about it. It's a wizard place."

The ringing of a bell announced just then the signal that they must return, and Alison gave one last gaze round. The sun was setting, and certainly the scene looked romantic, with dark shadows in the moat, and an owl hooting somewhere among the trees, all combined to give the desirable air of mystery.

46 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Inside the house, however, the presence of sixty-four girls dispelled any such notions, and ghosts, if they existed, would surely flee away from a crowded school to a more congenial sanctuary. They found the large hall lighted with oil lamps, and Miss Gerrard at once began to organize games, which made a very cheerful evening. A table at the end supplied milk and biscuits, and they filed upstairs to bed at intervals, the juniors first. When it came to the turn of IVA to mount the great oak staircase and proceed along a dim passage Alison grasped Janie's arm and produced a dramatic shudder.

"Isn't it horribly spooky?" she murmured. "I'm so thankful we're in dormitories. I wouldn't sleep alone here for a thousand pounds. I'm glad you have the next bed to mine. If you hear anything be sure you wake me!"

"I'm so sleepy all the ghosts and ghostesses in the world wouldn't wake me!" retorted Janie.

Marian, in the little room which led from her mother's, nestled down in bed reflectively. The advent of the school had been better than she had anticipated. The girls seemed nice and ready to enjoy the Grange. Her last thought was: "Alison suspected a mystery—and Arthur said the same—I wonder if there really *is* one. I wonder!"

CHAPTER IV

Form-mates

Miss Brookes had planned out the programme of her evacuated school with the utmost care. As her pupils were all under the age of fifteen she altered their former divisions and rearranged them as upper seniors, lower seniors, upper juniors and lower juniors. From among the elder girls she selected six as suitable prefects—Beatrice, Moira, Irene, Anne, Lucy and Hester. They were all much flattered at the choice. Hester, the youngest by a few weeks, was particularly elevated. It had always been the summit of her ambition, a post not to be obtained till she was seventeen, had passed the school certificate examination and had become a member of the Sixth Form. Here was she now at exactly fourteen and three-quarters, not fifteen till 4th August, and yet actually a prefect. She felt the responsibility was tremendous. She wrote four pages about it in her letter home, and began a diary in which she entered her new duties, and left pages for items of any school happenings in connexion with them.

Marian had been placed among the Lower Seniors in company with the girls from IVA, and Hilda was a member of the Upper Juniors, being bright for her age and well on with her work.

In the course of a few days' acquaintance Marian labelled her new form-mates in her own mind:

48 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Florence and Nora: pleasant enough but not inclined to be intimate. Too great chums to admit anyone else.

Patty: jolly and up to pranks.

Freda: perhaps genuinely homesick, but puts it on for effect.

Ethel: a girl who poses, and looks to see how you are taking it.

Lena: decidedly a bragger.

Mona, Bessie and Hazel: nonentities.

Enid and Muriel: doubtful. If they follow Florence and Nora, all right, but if they chum with Lena and Ethel it will spoil them.

Janie: a thoroughly good sort and sensible.

Alison: romantic and interesting.

With herself that made the number of the Lower Seniors as fourteen, a fortunate circumstance in their opinion. They had discussed it among themselves, for as there were no desks and they had to sit round a table for classes, it would have made the fatal number of "thirteen at table" if Marian had not been included.

"Probably that's why Miss Brookes put you with us?" suggested Ethel.

"Why, where else could she put me?" retorted Marian smartly. "Surely not in the Juniors? Perhaps you think I ought to have been with the Upper Seniors?"

"Hardly!" sniggered Lena.

"How old are you?" demanded Muriel.

"I was thirteen in February."

"That's about our average."

"Well, I wouldn't have sat thirteen at table," declared Alison, "you may call me superstitious, but I just couldn't have done it. Miss Brookes would either have had to bring somebody down from the upper Seniors or moved someone up from the Upper Juniors."

"Thirteen is an unlucky number!" conceded Nora.

"Yes, and if anyone gets a cold and has to stop in bed," continued Alison dramatically, "someone else must do the same to avoid the rest of us being thirteen at table. We must arrange that beforehand. Who's game to sham ill and stop in bed?"

"Don't be a goose," laughed Florence. "We shan't catch colds and stop in bed during the summer term."

"I'm only planning in advance. You never know. Safety first is my motto," persisted Alison.

"You haven't calculated on Miss Humphries," sniffed Nora. "She'd probably come and sit at the table with us, or make a couple of us move to a side table. That would be an easy solution."

"So she would. I never thought of that. Well, well!" philosophized Ethel. "There goes the luck!"

Marian considered the luck was on her side, as it ensured her a favourable reception in her new form. She might so easily have been an alien among these girls from another school. The fact that her mother was the warden might be a point against her, but on the other hand that her family owned the Grange might be an asset. She was careful not to stress this, however. She did not intend to rival Lena in boasting.

Hilda, who was a hail-fellow-well-met child, had

50 Mystery of the Moated Grange

easily made friends among the juniors and was already popular. She and lively Christine seemed destined to become leaders in their particular activities. They were arranging a secret society among their own section which they would not reveal to the seniors, a cabal which involved pressing each other's little fingers and swearing absolute fidelity.

Marian, who chanced by accident to come across her sister's diary, left open in their bedroom, read the words: "Am now secretary of the S.S.I., and we will begin our investigations", but got no further, as Hilda rushed in and seized the manuscript.

"Oh! Oh! Did you read anything?" she gasped tragically.

"No! only a line, which I don't understand in the least!" consoled Marian. "You shouldn't leave your private papers about."

"I certainly shan't again. You're quite sure you didn't learn anything?" with a keen glance.

"Not a hint."

"Well, that's a relief anyway!" sighed Hilda, clasping the notebook to her breast with the air of a member of the Secret Service, and making a hasty exit.

Marian smiled to herself.

"Those juniors!" she ruminated. "They like their little mysteries, poor children."

And then the idea recurred to her that perhaps there *were* mysteries in connexion with the Grange. Arthur had suggested it first and Hilda had heard him. Alison had certainly sensed something mysterious on the evening of her arrival. It might merely be romantic

nonsense on her part, nothing more. On the other hand was there some secret hidden in the old house, and yet to be discovered?

Meantime, while his sisters were settling down among their companions, Arthur had joined the Leomford Grammar School, together with a number of boys evacuated from the College at Ashmont. It had been difficult to billet these in the immediate neighbourhood of the town, so twenty of them had been placed at the Abbey Farm in charge of a master, Mr. Derrick. As they all possessed bicycles the four miles to and from Leomford would be no difficulty for them. It was much more camp life than at the Grange. Some younger boys slept in the house, but the majority, including Arthur, occupied bunks in the big barn. They took their meals in the large farm kitchen, and did their preparation under strict supervision in the parlour, which Mrs. Lowman had allotted to them for that purpose on the stipulation that it was only used for lessons, and not for recreation. All lively activities must be conducted out of doors, or, if wet, inside the barn.

The evenings were growing so light now that when the boys had finished their prep, they stayed outside till bedtime, and eagerly offered themselves as squads to Mr. Lowman to do any odd jobs he could find for them on the farm. There was a shed, with carpenter's bench and tools, which occupied some, and others dug in the garden or helped to weed. The milking and feeding of animals was an absorbing interest to all.

Mr. Derrick, the master in charge, was young and

10813

52 Mystery of the Moated Grange

a decided personality. He had that happy power of attraction which drew young people to him, and unconsciously raised them to his own atmosphere. He regarded his post as something like that of a leader in a boys' club and studied their needs from that angle. To keep them usefully and patriotically employed out of school hours would prevent their getting into mischief, and if they realized they were helping on the farm in the cause of Victory they would be less likely to do foolish things that would hinder and annoy Mr. Lowman. His little regiment, as he called it, was to be essentially a "help the war" effort, not a tiresome crowd of evacuees.

The boys responded very well. Arthur in particular developed a great hero-worship for Mr. Derrick, and was ready to act for him in any way. He was just the kind of leader that appealed to him, so practical and jolly, and yet with such high ideals. To hear him talk put new ideas into a boy's head. Yes, he would follow Mr. Derrick anywhere. The other fellows were quite a sporting crowd too. They were all enjoying camp life. It was different, of course, from the old round of cricket in summer, but when fathers were in the forces it behoved sons to do something for the country too. Some of the boys liked horses and learnt to groom them, others were interested in tractors, the springing crops attracted most, and altogether life on a farm was a new branch of education.

Mrs. Bevan called to see how Arthur was getting on, and to make the acquaintance of Mr. Derrick. She took Miss Brookes with her, and the two teachers found they had much in common and were working

on the same general lines. Perhaps Mr. Derrick was glad to have a little feminine society as a relief from camp life, at any rate he dropped in sometimes at the Grange for an evening cup of coffee in the staff room, and seemed to enjoy the company of the ladies.

On Sundays it was too far to march the school to Leomford, but there was a small church at Beauley only a mile away, a chapel-of-ease to a larger parish some distance off, and a service was held there on Sunday afternoons. Here the pupils from the Grange and also from the Abbey Farm put in an appearance, making such a good show that they nearly filled the little church. The rector, accustomed to a scanty number of villagers, was delighted at such an unexpected addition to his congregation. He paid a special call afterwards at Maenan Grange to express his appreciation to Miss Brookes, and to hope her girls would continue to attend the services. He also had a welcome for Mrs. Bevan.

"Yes, yes, I knew Mr. Tristram Bevan," he explained, "but I fear he did not often favour church-going, especially during his last years. Poor man, he grew very peculiar. Shut himself up like a hermit. Well, well! *De mortuis nisi nihil bonum!* Excuse my Latin quotation. It's grown into a habit of mine. The Grange is a fine old place. When your husband has finished with the army he will enjoy living here. I suppose nothing has ever been heard of poor William? No, no! Pardon me for asking. Well, I'm glad the old family has not quite died out. You have a son of your own? A worthy inheritance for him. The Grange has seen history over many centuries, and so has the

54 Mystery of the Moated Grange

neighbourhood. That's my particular hobby, archæology and folklore—most fascinating subjects to study. Don't you agree with me?"

He turned appealingly to Miss Brookes, blinking through his spectacles. "When one lives in the country one must have a hobby, and I have given all my spare time—apart from the parish—to this."

"Yes, I think it's a most interesting subject, especially in a neighbourhood that seems so full of antiquities. There doesn't appear to be a really good guidebook of the district. I was wondering if I could find one in Leomford, so as to be able to tell my girls something about the place."

"I'm afraid you won't find an adequate guide book in any of the shops, I tried myself," volunteered Mrs. Bevan.

"No, no," the rector shook his head. "I'm quite sure you won't. In the meantime, however, would you care to permit me to act guidebook? What I mean is that I should be very pleased to come some evening and give a talk to your school about the history and antiquities of the district."

"Oh, that would be delightful!" exclaimed Miss Brookes. "The girls would enjoy it immensely. Quite an educational advantage for them. How kind of you to suggest it."

"We might follow it up afterwards by taking excursions to some of the places."

"An excellent idea, that would just suit us all."

"Then we must arrange it. By the by it seems a pity to leave out the boys at the Abbey. They might be interested too. Could you admit them?"

"Why not? There would be plenty of room in the hall. They certainly ought to be given the opportunity."

"Then I'll step across now and see their schoolmaster. Let me see, what's his name? Derrick? Oh, thank you. He seems an intelligent young man. What day would suit you best?"

"I should say a Friday evening, as there need be no preparation then. The time? Half-past six, if that is convenient for you."

The Rev. Howard Carter pulled out a notebook and made an entry of the date and time.

"Next Friday then at 6.30," he said, as he shook hands with both ladies. "I am glad you also, Mrs. Bevan, take such an interest in your husband's ancient family home."

"A dear old man," declared Miss Brookes with enthusiasm when he had gone. "I like these old-world country parsons with their courtly Victorian manners and refined tastes. I'm glad he called. It's a good idea to include the boys for his lecture. I'm a believer in co-education. Why should you separate them in all their work? I'm sure they'll be as interested in the talk as the girls. I hope he'll tell us plenty of the old legends of the neighbourhood. I'm longing to hear them."

So said Miss Brookes, though she little knew to what the rector's talk would lead, or what the various happenings might be that would ensue from it.

CHAPTER V

Legends of the Past

On the following Friday, punctually at half-past six, the rector's small car rumbled up to the Grange. He found both girls and boys ready seated in the hall, together with the mistresses, Mr. Derrick and Mrs. Bevan. He glanced round with approbation. It was the kind of audience that delighted him. To pass the torch on to youth was always his ambition. In these strenuous days of modern warfare the study of aeroplanes and tanks was apt to oust any interest in the former history of their country from young Britons, and he considered it an important part of their education. His own parishioners had shown an entire lack of enthusiasm when he had tried to organize a lecture at the church institute, so here was his golden opportunity, with—counting the teachers—about ninety receptive minds and attentive faces before him. He greeted Mrs. Bevan and Miss Brookes, was conducted to a tall oak chair and a little table at the end, arranged his notes, cleared his throat and began.

“In order to understand the history of this neighbourhood I want you first to try and throw your minds back to an era of perhaps nearly three thousand years ago. In those days most of this country was covered with forest, and the ancient inhabitants lived for safety in a great camp, fortified with earthworks, which still remains on the top of a hill called Caradoc Edge,

about four miles from here on the border of Wales. We know little about them, except that in excavating the camp we have found flint implements, pottery and some bronze swords. Probably they were often at war with neighbouring tribes, and that also they had to defend their camp against the hordes of wolves that infested the forests in those early days.

“Most likely they had cattle, which they herded on the short grass of the mountains, and drove into the enclosure of the camp at nights, and that they collected acorns and nuts to store for winter-time.

“Of their so-called religion we are ignorant, but they are thought to have practised some kind of sun worship. At any rate they left behind them, on the next mountain beyond their camp, a circle of standing stones, resembling those at Stonehenge, and here and there a great single standing stone, which may have been either a monument to a chief or an object of worship.

“If you will look in the third field to the back of this house you will see one of these great stones, and it is from this stone that the Grange is named, for Maenan means a big stone in the ancient speech that has survived. In past times it must have been an object of veneration, for all down the centuries an element of superstition has adhered to it. In pre-historic times, when a stone marked a burial place, the dead man's spirit was thought to enter into it and dwell therein, and certainly there is a story in this neighbourhood that if you go at midnight on All Souls' Eve, and stand beside the stone, a ghost will appear there. Anybody who tried to remove the stone

58 Mystery of the Moated Grange

always got into sad trouble. A farmer once began to drag it away so that he could plough over the place, but immediately he met with terribly bad luck, his horses died, and his crops failed, so he replaced the stone, and it has not been trifled with since.

“In the summer it has a reputation for magical qualities. Whoever goes there on Midsummer Eve and places his hand on the stone may have a wish, and if a child is carried round it three times, sunwise, on Midsummer morning, it is said to cure rickets.”

Mr. Carter paused, took a drink of water, cleared his throat again, and went on.

“Well, enough about prehistoric folk and their stone monuments. The next people to come here were the Romans, who in the first centuries after Christ were conquering Britain. It took them some time to reach the west, where the more warlike tribes had retreated among the mountains, but their legions were certainly in this district, for they occupied the old camp on Caradoc Edge, leaving coins and other trophies behind them.

“The remains of some of their splendid roads can still be traced. The road you take to Leomford is one of them. And to the north of Leomford I helped to excavate a Roman villa, where we found part of a beautiful tiled floor, laid down no doubt for a Roman governor who was sent to keep order in this province more than sixteen hundred years ago. Try and imagine this splendid Roman, we will call him Julius Marcus, riding along this road at the head of his legion, and his wife—shall we call her Calpurnia?—carried in a litter with silken curtains, and think of

their life in the villa, with slaves to wait on them, and their little children running about in the garden where they had planted vines and flowers brought from Italy.

“The centuries went by, and in A.D. 410 the Roman occupation ended, and the legions were withdrawn for the defence of Rome itself against her enemies. We may be sure then that tribes rushed down from the mountains and burnt the villa, and that the district went back rapidly to barbarism.

“It was now the turn of the Saxon invasion, and hordes of fierce warriors appeared, who possessed the land and drove the Celts back into the hills. A great leader named Offa built an earthen fortification from the Dee to the Wye, and you can trace the remains of Offa's Dyke, as it is still called, in the fields to the west of here. At first they were pagans, but gradually Christianity filtered in, and slowly civilization improved. There were farms, and village communities, and local government administered by freemen. They had arts and crafts of their own and the beginnings of literature. a

“This went on for some hundreds of years, till in 1066 came the Norman invasion and again the land changed hands. During the Middle Ages this part of Herefordshire was a constant scene of struggle against the Welsh. A chain of small castles guarded the border, the owners of which were called Lords of the Marches. Maenan Grange was originally one of these, and that ivy-covered tower at the west end marks the remains of what was once a stronghold, where armed men were continually on the watch against foes.

60 Mystery of the Moated Grange

“ In about 1247 Maenan Abbey was founded for a Cistercian order of monks—you boys should be interested in this. It was probably built so close to the keep for purposes of mutual protection. The soldiers were guarding the frontier, and even the Welsh had a respect for a religious house. It was not large, but from the few ruins that remain we conclude it must have been a fine building.

“ And now from out of the hazy mist which surrounds early history we can begin to trace some facts, some definite chronicles which have survived the centuries.

“ Several of the brethren from Maenan Abbey went on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem, and when they returned in safety one of them, Brother Athansius by name, wrote a chronicle of their travels, which is still preserved in the Bodleian Library.

“ Maenan Castle, as it then was, belonged in the twelfth century to Sir Baldwin de Brecon, and he, catching the spirit of his age, joined the Third Crusade under Richard Cœur de Lion, fighting against Saladin, and with a record of great bravery. In the parish church at Leomford you can still see his tomb, with his carved monument, his head resting on his shield and his legs crossed to show he had taken part in a Crusade against the infidels.

“ His bones are dust,
His good sword rust,
His soul is with the saints we trust.

“ We have no records of Maenan in the next century, but when we come to the Wars of the Roses

there is a tragic story that has been handed down for generations. The owner of the castle was then Sir Hugh de Brecon, and he was on the side of the Lancastrians, and had secretly aided Queen Margaret, who had taken refuge in Wales. Richard of York sent his son Edward to the Welsh Marches to keep Wales in check, and the fortress of Maenan was besieged by part of his army.

“ Sir Hugh was unprepared, and though his men were able to defend the stronghold, provisions ran very short and the water in the well was not good. As rations grew less and less there were grumblers in the castle who maintained that Richard of York would make as good a king as Henry of Lancaster. Sir Hugh remained loyal to Queen Margaret's cause, but he grew very uneasy, knowing that many of his garrison wished to surrender. Again and again he had sent messengers to try to reach the Lancastrian forces beyond Hereford, but they had all been captured by the Yorkists. He dared not trust any of his remaining men, fearing they would only go over to the enemy.

“ In the early days of the war he had sent his wife and the younger children to a convent in Shropshire, but his eldest boy had begged to remain at the castle with his father. This little fellow now offered to try and bear a letter to a neighbouring knight near Leomford, urging him to send a message for help to the nearest Lancastrian army, and as there was no one else to be trusted Sir Hugh reluctantly agreed.

“ At that date there was a garden courtyard to the castle with a high wall adjoining the moat, which then

62 Mystery of the Moated Grange

surrounded the place entirely. So one night, by faint moonlight, he took little Walter, with a letter securely stitched inside his doublet, to a tiny grating under the wall, which led on to the moat. He lifted this up, and the boy squeezed through and swam across the water, disappearing among the reeds and bushes on the far side.

“Sir Hugh did not expect relief to come for some days, but meantime his anxieties increased. The monks had fled from the Abbey to a safer sanctuary in another monastery, and the Yorkist soldiers were in possession of all the stores they had left behind, while the castle starved. Every day Sir Hugh used to pace up and down the courtyard within the wall, where he had bade good-bye to his son, hoping the boy was safe, though alas! the little fellow had been killed almost at once by a thrust from a sentry.

“Then a mutiny broke out in the castle, the disloyal retainers opened a door and admitted the Yorkist soldiers, who rushed into the courtyard, surrounded Sir Hugh and slew him. In a wild orgy afterwards they set the place on fire, and it was burnt to the ground, with the exception of the tower that still stands.

“Behind the cowhouses at the back of the Grange, there is a strip of grass near part of the ancient wall, overshadowed by some trees. By old tradition this has always been called Sir Hugh’s walk, and it is said that if you stand there at twilight you can hear the rustle of his footsteps as he strides over the grass coming back to peer at the postern.”

The rector again paused to refresh his throat with a sip of water. Miss Brookes moved uneasily in her

chair. She had caught a glimpse of round-eyed horror in the faces of the youngsters sitting in the front row. She hoped their lecturer was not going to tell any more ghost stories. She hardly liked to interrupt him. The Rev. Howard Carter, however, had no such qualms about legends of hauntings. He was a widower with no family, and had little idea of what was suitable or unsuitable for juniors. Having been born in a neighbouring parish he had absorbed all the "old wives' tales" of the district in his own early childhood and had probably forgotten the thrills they had caused him. Moreover, he was warming to his subject, and seeing the rapt attention of his audience he smiled benignly and continued:

"Well, would you like some more stories about Maenan Grange? When the soldiers had marched away from the neighbourhood the monks returned to the Abbey, and continued their former occupations of tilling the soil, illuminating manuscript books and holding services in the church. The castle, however, remained a ruin for more than thirty years. But the widow of Sir Hugh was a distant relation of the Earl of Pembroke, and she persuaded him to take her little son Arthur, a younger brother of Walter, as a page at Chepstow Castle. There he grew up taught in the chivalry of the age, and finally found favour at the court of Henry VII, where he married Olwen Ap-Evan, a Welsh heiress, who was a ward of the crown.

"By the custom of those times the king had the power to bestow her hand in marriage, but perhaps she liked the handsome Arthur, and was glad to return to the borders of her native Wales. Probably

64 Mystery of the Moated Grange

to please her he changed his family name from Brecon to Bevan, an abbreviation of Ap-Evan. With her fortune he erected a Manor house at Maenan on the site of the old castle, only keeping a portion of the tower, which still stood, in the new building.

“ So things went on until the stormy days of the reformation. Then Henry VIII sent his envoys to confiscate and destroy Maenan Abbey. The monks were turned out and the whole of the beautiful buildings were battered down. The King’s representatives had expected to secure rich treasure there, but to their disappointment they found very little. It was always rumoured that the monks had bestowed the gold and silver vessels and jewelled chalices in some secret spot; but no one ever discovered the hiding-place, though many people have dug among the ruins. The farmers of the neighbourhood carted away the stones of the Abbey to rebuild their farmhouses and barns, so very little is left of it now.

“ When the king’s commissioners came to take possession, one monk, Brother Ambrose, refused to leave, but, when he found he was to be questioned about the treasure, he escaped to Maenan Grange, where for some time he remained hidden in a tiny secret room. He used to come out at night to get food, and would walk up and down the passages for exercise to ease his cramped limbs. Unfortunately there was a spy among the servants, who discovered this and informed the commissioners. They came to the Grange, found Brother Ambrose in his hiding-place and dragged him away. He preferred death to revealing any secrets of the Abbey, so the whereabouts of

the treasure remained unknown. It is said that his footsteps are still heard in the passages where he used to pace up and down in the small hours of the night."

A shudder passed through the school, and Miss Brookes almost rose to remonstrate, but the rector, still absorbed in his subject, took no notice and continued his narrative unchecked.

"Another curious legend in connexion with the Grange is that of the Drumming Well. In a field just between here and the Abbey there is a very ancient well, under a big hawthorn tree. Probably in early times it was a sacred well, and later a wishing well. Then it acquired a strange reputation. In the days of Queen Elizabeth the owner of the Grange was Edward Bevan, a hot-tempered squire. He was much annoyed by a party of gipsies who camped near the well on their way to Leomford, where they were to attend a fair and give an acrobatic performance. He went in great wrath to turn them off his land, and seizing the drum of their band captain he threw it down the well.

"The gipsy in equal indignation solemnly cursed him, and declared that, though at the bottom of the well, the drum would beat when any misfortune was about to occur either to the Bevan family or to the nation at large. Whether true or not the story persisted in the neighbourhood, and it is said the drum was heard on the day of Queen Elizabeth's death, on the day of the execution of Charles I, during the Indian Mutiny, and before certain events which happened to the Bevans, and which rumour declared it foretold."

At this point, as the rector again made a pause to

66 Mystery of the Moated Grange

take another sip of water, Miss Brookes rose and whispered to him.

“Dear, dear! I’m very sorry!” he remarked. “Your mistress begs me not to tell you any more alarming stories. I sincerely hope I haven’t frightened you. Believe me they are only ancient legends and mustn’t be taken seriously in these modern days. They are nothing but folklore of the district. To conclude you shall have a much happier tale, which I believe is absolutely true.

“In the time of Charles II the owner of the Grange was a Mr. Godfrey Bevan. He had a very beautiful daughter named Dorothy, and she was courted by Bertrand Howell, the younger son of a neighbouring squire. Her father, however, opposed the match, as he wished her to marry someone of higher rank and fortune. Young Bertrand, dressed in his best clothes, came to the Grange to ask formally for the hand of Dorothy, and was rejected with much scorn. He was leaving the gate of the Grange when a strange chance favoured him. A small cavalcade was passing by, no less than the Merry Monarch himself with a few courtiers, on his way to Leomford, and the king’s horse suddenly stumbled and nearly threw its rider. Bernard seized it by the rein and saved an accident, then, being used to horses, he examined its forefeet, and extracted a stone. Charles was full of gratitude and, saying he was thirsty, declared he would call at the Grange and ask its owner for refreshment for himself and his followers. He insisted upon including the reluctant Bernard in the party, in spite of his protestations.

“Mr. Godfrey Bevan was overwhelmed with sur-

prise at a visit from the King, but he loyally called up all the resources of his household to offer some suitable entertainment for the royal party, and presently, seated in the great hall, a meal and his best wines were spread forth.

“Lovely Dorothy herself filled his majesty’s goblet, and smiled and curtsied to him most charmingly. Charles always had an eye for a pretty face, he found the wine good, and he was in a pleasant temper. Before he rose to take his leave he beckoned to her.

“‘Fair Hebe!’ he said, ‘we have rarely had a cup-bearer that pleased us more! Ask a boon, and we will surely grant it to thee. What wilt thou, sweet maid?’

“Dorothy snatched her opportunity, she was a clever maiden. ‘Your most gracious Majesty,’ she replied, falling on her knees, ‘My dearest wish is to be married to my lover Bertrand Howell.’

“‘What! Our young friend who saved us just now from an accident? And what impedes the progress of true love, pretty maid?’

“‘My father urges that he is neither noble nor rich!’

“‘Oddsfish!’ laughed the Merry Monarch, ‘we can soon remedy that. Rivers, hath that manor in Shropshire, lately sequestered, been granted to anyone? No? Then we here and now bestow it on Mr. Bertrand Howell. Come hither, our young friend and kneel before us!’

“Bertrand advanced and fell on his knees before the King, who, taking his sword from its sheath, struck him lightly on the shoulder, uttering the words: ‘Arise, Sir Bernard!’

68 Mystery of the Moated Grange

“ ‘Now,’ continued Charles, ‘thou hast thy boon, pretty maid, for thy lover is both noble and rich, and thy father cannot deny thee what his King sanctions.’ ”

“ So saying he joined the hands of Bernard and Dorothy, with a glance at Godfrey Bevan, who bowed deeply in assent.

“ As you may imagine there were great rejoicings at Mistress Dorothy’s unexpected good fortune, and her wedding was one of the events of the neighbourhood. Now, as time is getting on, and I have a meeting of our parochial council to attend this evening, I must hurry away. I fear I have already overstepped the limit allowed me by Miss Brookes.

“ I hope you have been interested in these memories of the past history of Maenan. I always think those who are living in a place should know what has happened there in days gone by. Let me recommend to you all the study of archæology and folk-lore, they are most fascinating subjects and well worth your attention.”

Looking at his watch again, the Rev. Howard Carter gathered up his notes and placed them in one of his capacious pockets. Miss Brookes, on behalf of the school, made a short speech thanking him for his very interesting lecture, and Mrs. Bevan also added her tribute, and the pupils clapped with the utmost enthusiasm.

“ Thank you, thank you!” he replied. “ I’m only too glad if you’ve enjoyed my rambling reminiscences. I shall hope to see you all in church next Sunday! Good-bye, everybody! I mustn’t be late for my parochial council!”

He hurriedly took his departure, and they heard the sound of his car speeding down the drive.

The result of the rector's stories was what might have been expected and what Miss Brookes had dreaded. The juniors were almost too scared to go to bed. They finished their milk and biscuits in solemn silence, and when it came to ascending the stairs they clung together in little groups, peeping apprehensively into the passage, and uttering squeals when a door suddenly banged. Mrs. Bevan, who shepherded them to their dormitories, told them it was all nonsense and that they had nothing to be afraid of, but they refused to be comforted, and undressed with many shudders. When she peeped at them, half an hour after leaving the dormitories, she found them nestled two in a bed, for each child had crept to a neighbour's for human company, not daring to sleep alone. She wisely left them so, and did not disturb them.

Even the elder girls felt little shivers creeping down their spines when they discussed the lecture.

"Does Brother Ambrose really steal up and down the passages?" quavered Alison.

"I shall never dare to go behind the cowsheds for fear of hearing Sir Hugh's footsteps!" gasped Ethel.

"But that's where we feed the hens!" objected Mona.

"I know, but we'll have to feed them somewhere else!" declared Freda.

"I remember now the grass there kept waving in a most peculiar manner," shivered Muriel.

"Oh! Did it? How?" asked Bessie.

"Well, there was no wind, and yet it rustled!"

"How horrible!"

70 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Where is this drumming well, Marian? Have you seen it?"

"No, but I shall go and look for it."

"Did it drum before your uncle died?" There was horror in Enid's voice.

"Not that I know of. But I'd never heard of the well before until this evening."

"Shall you ask Mrs. Griffiths?"

"I don't suppose she'd tell."

"No, she hates questions."

"How many ghosts are there in this old Grange?" demanded Alison tragically.

"I'm not sure. Let's count them up," said Patty. "Well, to begin with Sir Hugh, who stalks down the avenue—that's one—then probably little Walter who comes up from the moat to join his father!"

"That makes two! I hadn't thought of Walter! No doubt he haunts, as well."

"Then of course Brother Ambrose, who steals all about the passages."

"Ugh! He's the worst. I hope he doesn't come into the bedrooms! That makes three."

"What about Mistress Dorothy? Perhaps she rustles her silken skirts in the hall?"

"Is she a spook too?"

"She might be. She'd make four!"

"Four too many!" shivered Alison. "When I came here I never bargained for ghosts."

The others made cautious sympathetic noises, shook their heads, and following the example of the juniors went upstairs in close groups, jumping uneasily when the old oak stairs creaked.

Next morning, after prayers, Miss Brookes, who was really disturbed about the matter, gave a short talk about the folly of superstition, how legends arose, and how science had exposed many ignorant notions.

"Uneducated people often attribute quite simple natural things to supernatural causes," she explained. "A draught bangs a door, and they imagine a ghost. I hope you will all be more sensible and remember you're living in an enlightened century and that these old stories have absolutely no foundation in fact. Don't let your imaginations deceive you. The Grange is certainly *not* haunted, and there is nothing to alarm you."

"All the same," whispered Alison to Marian, "you won't catch *me* going down Sir Hugh's walk at sunset, and as for Brother Ambrose, if I hear his footsteps in the corridor I shall shriek!"

CHAPTER VI

A Surprise

It was on the Wednesday morning after the lecture given by the Rev. Howard Carter that a most unexpected thing happened, so unforeseen that the Bevan children felt as if fate, that had already been juggling with their fortunes, had now given another turn to her wheel, and rather a nasty jog too. The postman arrived as usual at about half-past eight, and among

72 Mystery of the Moated Grange

other letters for the Grange there was one for Mrs. Bevan with a Northumberland postmark. She knew her husband's writing and she opened it eagerly. She was aware that his unit had been transferred to the north, but was still waiting for his address. It contained some very important news. He was settled in quite comfortable quarters, thank goodness, but he had a proposal to put before her. In the town near where he was stationed there was a large hostel for munition girls employed at a government factory. The warden of this hostel had been taken ill very suddenly, and removed to hospital for a serious operation. The hostel without a competent head was like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, and the most urgent need was a new warden at once. He was authorized by the officer of the Ministry of Labour to offer the post to Mrs. Bevan if she could set off and come immediately to take the reins and carry on. The letter, after some more private remarks, ended with "please telegraph".

Mrs. Bevan was a woman who could come to an instant decision, and she made up her mind now. To begin with she would be living near her husband and would be able to see him often. Secondly, the salary offered was far higher than that which she was receiving as warden at the Grange, and in these difficult times money was a consideration. Thirdly, it was a war job, and she could justly feel patriotic in taking it on. And fourthly, she felt she was rather superfluous at Maenan Grange.

Her position there was in fact somewhat difficult. As wife of the owner, and also warden, she had natur-

ally considered herself mistress of the establishment, but Miss Brookes as Head of the school which was renting the house from Captain Bevan, also naturally considered *herself* the mistress, who should give orders. Though the two ladies had avoided any open clash there had been several awkward situations, and matters were beginning to grow rather strained. Any one so capable and energetic as Mrs. Bevan was competent for a wider sphere of action, and the prospect of managing eighty munition girls was more attractive than staying to help with sixty-four school-girls, with whom she had been tacitly given to understand she must not interfere. Her children were quite settled now at Maenan and would be well looked after in her absence. There was absolutely no hindrance to the scheme, and she at once gave it an emphatic "yes".

She hurried for a private interview with Miss Brookes and put the proposition to her. The head mistress, though secretly delighted, hid her emotions under a decent appearance of regret.

"Of course I should be extremely sorry to lose you, Mrs. Bevan! But in the circumstances I quite understand how important it is you should accept this war job. We must all help our country. And you would be near your husband. Yes, I could spare you immediately if you wish to start to-day. We'll manage somehow. I must have a word with Miss Laxon. Will you kindly ask her to come to me in the staff room. Oh, yes, please make your own arrangements!"

Having thus received official sanction to leave Maenan, Mrs. Bevan wrote a telegram to her hus-

74 Mystery of the Moated Grange

band: "Accept offer. Arriving to-day." There was no telephone at the Grange, so she sent Marian on her bicycle to Leomford, with instructions to dispatch the wire, and to go on to the station and ascertain the time of the earliest available train service to the north, and to order a taxi to come to fetch her. Meanwhile she set to work to pack whatever necessities she deemed advisable to take with her.

Marian, her head in a whirl of amazement, made the journey to Leomford with record speed, called at the post office, then with the help of the stationmaster wrote down the trains and the numerous changes on the route to Northumberland, ordered the taxi, and was back at the Grange on her cycle barely five minutes before it arrived. She found her mother quite ready, with two suitcases packed.

"Good girl!" said Mrs. Bevan. "You're a splendid little messenger. I don't know how I should have managed without you. By catching this train I shall just get there by this evening. I'm sorry to have to rush off in such a hurry, but it can't be helped."

"I suppose Daddy wants you?" asked Marian.

"Yes, and so do eighty munition girls. As I told you it's an urgent war job. I couldn't refuse."

"I hear the taxi now!"

"Yes, go and call Miss Brookes and Hilda. I must say good-bye to Hilda! And you must see Arthur this evening and tell him I've gone, and why."

"I will, Mummie!"

Miss Brookes and a much dismayed Hilda came with Marian to the front door as Mrs. Bevan was handing her luggage to the taxi driver.

"Well, I wish you every success in your new work!" said the Head encouragingly.

"Mummie! Are you going away?" gasped Hilda.

"Yes, my darling, to do a war job."

"For how long? When will you come back?"

"That I can't tell you. It depends on the war."

"Daddy wants her!" put in Marian.

"Mayn't I go with you?"

"No, no, darling! You must be good children when I'm gone. I'll write as soon as I can. Say good-bye now. I must be off!"

With a final hug to each of her girls Mrs. Bevan entered the taxi, waved a farewell to Miss Brookes, and was driven away down to the gate and along the road to Leomford.

Hilda, with her eyes full of tears, remarked dramatically:

"Are we orphans now?"

"No, of course not!" replied Miss Brookes brightly. "You're just at boarding school like all the rest of the girls who are away from their parents. *They* haven't got their mothers with them. Cheer up! Let us see how brave you can be. Where's your handkerchief? That's right! Now run back to your form and get on with your lessons. And you too, Marian. Yes, you may put your bicycle away first."

Mopping away her trickling tears Hilda returned to an arithmetic class, and if a few splashes blurred part of the figures in her sums, Miss Humphries was wise enough to ignore them. Some of her junior pupils had been homesick during the first week of their arrival, but they had soon recovered their spirits

76 Mystery of the Moated Grange

and had settled down. At the eleven o'clock lunch-time, however, certain of her companions rallied Hilda on her depressed appearance, not too kindly.

"Don't turn on the water works, *please!*" said Isobel. "We've got over that phase by now!"

"We want a nursery in this school!" mocked Kathleen.

"*Your* mothers haven't gone away suddenly and left you!" gulped Hilda.

"No, we were yanked away suddenly from them!" retorted Mary.

"We're evacs!" said Beryl, "and we've just got to make the best of it, so buck up!"

"It's quite jolly here!" announced Audley.

"Yes, on the whole I like it," agreed Nellie.

"So we all do," endorsed Peggie.

"Well, at any rate it's my *home!*" proclaimed Hilda, "even if it *is* a boarding school."

And with that she scrubbed her eyes with her damp handkerchief, drank her milk, felt better, and determined to show a brave face towards a decidedly unsympathetic audience. After all she remembered she was a *Bevan*, and according to the rector's lecture last Friday, the Bevans had come through many trials with great credit. She certainly must not disgrace the traditions of her illustrious ancestors.

"That's right! Be a sport!" murmured Audley, taking her arm.

"Miss Humphries said we may go for a ramble before tea this afternoon," consoled Nellie.

"Kathleen was quite as bad the first day or two," whispered Peggie, "only she doesn't care to be

reminded of it now. Take no notice of her. If we may choose our ramble let's all vote for the river. You'll like that?"

"Yes, it's a lovely walk. We can get flowers for our collections," returned Hilda, much comforted.

Marian, being older than Hilda, and understanding the situation better, did not take the departure of her mother so hardly. She knew it was unavoidable. The first thing to be done was to tell Arthur about it. He dined in Leomford, and he and the other boys who were billeted at the Abbey Farm did not return till about half-past four. That afternoon therefore before tea, she took French leave and ran across to the Abbey. She found Arthur just putting away his bicycle, and they had a confabulation inside one of the barns, where they could talk in private. He was naturally surprised but agreed that his mother had done the right thing.

"Trust Dad and the Mater!" he said. "After all she wasn't really needed, I suppose, at the Grange. What I mean is your Miss Brookes and the rest of them can carry on. I rather gather Miss B. likes to run the show?"

"She does, very emphatically."

"Um! I thought so."

"It was a trifle hard on Mums."

"Then she's better away."

"Yes, but it may be a trifle hard on us, now she's gone!"

"Oh, cheer up, old sport!"

"I shall bring my troubles to you!"

"If you get any!" laughed Arthur. "Hello, there's

78 Mystery of the Moated Grange

our tea bell. I must scoot or those other chaps will scoop up all the jam before I get there! Ta-ta!"

Arthur bolted from the barn, and Marian returned leisurely to the Grange, where she found the school already seated at tea. Miss Brookes glanced at her as she took her place, but made no remark at the time. When the meal was finished, however, she beckoned to Marian and told her to go and wait in the warden's room, where she would join her presently.

Wondering what was the matter, Marian obeyed. The warden's room was the small sitting-room which her mother had reserved for her own use. Miss Brookes had evidently appropriated it at once, for her books and papers were spread out on the desk. Marian sat down and waited for at least ten minutes, feeling very impatient. At last the head mistress entered, and taking a chair at the desk turned to her pupil.

"Why were you late for tea, Marian? Where had you been?"

"I went to the Abbey, Miss Brookes, to tell Arthur that Mother has gone away."

"You went without asking my permission?"

"Why, yes. Mother *told* me to go and tell Arthur."

"You knew you ought to ask leave first?"

"I—I—never thought of it!" stammered Marian.

"Well, you know now. I cannot allow girls in this school to go out just when they like. In future, remember, you must obey rules as all the others do. You understand that?"

"Yes, Miss Brookes."

"Very well, you may go now!"

Miss Brookes considered that hitherto she had been

in a difficult position regarding Marian and Hilda. As Mrs. Bevan was warden they had gone to their mother for permission about many things, and she felt that they had not thoroughly realized her authority as head of the school. According to her theories of psychology she classed them as "spoilt". They had probably been greatly indulged at home and accustomed to do much as they liked. She intended to alter all that. A little wholesome discipline in company with the rest of their form-mates would do them all the good in the world. Rules must be obeyed, and no extra privileges allowed. They could not be permitted to think that being Bevans and the daughters of the house gave them any right for special consideration. They were now merely ordinary pupils of the boarding school and must share alike with the others. That was that. She hoped they would soon realize the situation and would give no trouble.

Marian walked out of the room feeling crestfallen and somewhat sulky. So far her mother had stood as a shield between her and the staff, and she had thought that though they shared the classes she and Hilda were not entirely members of the school. The Grange was *their* house, and the others were merely evacuees. They surely were licensed to a certain amount of relaxation regarding the Code laid down for the rest. Miss Brookes had suddenly assumed a position which she, Marian, was not willing to accord her. Instead of the amiable, amenable person she had at first appeared, she now seemed to have stepped into the shoes of Miss Lowe, the head mistress of Axleford High School, who had been regarded with

80 Mystery of the Moated Grange

wholesome awe by her pupils, a "She-who-must-be obeyed", and whose word nobody dared to dispute.

Marian had been used to run across to the Abbey and talk to Arthur whenever she wished without even asking her mother, and the idea that she must now obtain permission was extremely distasteful. It was a curtailment of her liberty to which she was unaccustomed.

"I'll manage to see him somehow," she muttered. "They needn't think they'll cage me like this! I'll take good care of that."

Walking along the passage she met Miss Laxon, who said:

"Oh, Marian, I've been looking for you! We've changed you into a dormitory. Come along with me and I'll show you where you're to sleep now. We've brought all your things down."

"But why, Miss Laxon?" objected Marian. "Why am I to be turned out of our room?"

"It's needed for Miss Humphries. You and Hilda have each been put in dormitories."

"Who's in Mother's room then?"

"Oh, Miss Brookes has taken that."

"Taken Mummie's room!" burst out Marian.

"Of course! You wouldn't expect it to be left empty now Mrs. Bevan has left?"

"But——"

"Now don't argue," said Miss Laxon sharply. "Come along with me at once! I've no time to waste."

Owing to the large influx of girls some of them had had to be accommodated downstairs, and several empty sitting-rooms in the big house had been turned

into dormitories. Miss Laxon led the way along a corridor in the older portion of the Grange, and showed Marian into a room overlooking the garden. It contained eight small beds, and on one of these her nightdress case already reposed. Her brush and comb and sponge-bag lay on a shelf over the wash-hand stand, two drawers in a chest were open, and her various garments had been placed there. Miss Laxon pointed to some hooks behind a curtain.

"That's your wardrobe," she volunteered. "You'll find your coats and dresses hanging there."

Marian looked round forlornly.

"Who else is sleeping here?" she asked anxiously.

"Girls in your own form—let me see—Janie, Alison, Patty, Enid, Freda, Florence and Nora."

"And where is Hilda?"

"Upstairs with six of the juniors."

"Oh!"

"Well, if you want to rearrange your drawers you can do so now. They were very untidy in your other room, and Mrs. Griffiths tipped your things out anyhow to bring them down. I'll look at them to-morrow to see if they're neat and in order. Now I must go, for I have a great deal to see to." Then, noticing Marian's rueful face, she continued kindly: "Oh, you'll soon get accustomed to being here, and it'll be cheerful for you to be among friends of your own age. My little room is two doors along the corridor and I enjoy the view of the garden and the scent of the lilac through the windows, and so will you. There are always compensations in life!"

Miss Laxon hurried away to other urgent duties,

82 Mystery of the Moated Grange

leaving Marian at present averse to any future compensations. She was unreasonably annoyed that Miss Brookes had immediately commandeered her mother's room. Miss Brookes, on her side of the matter, had always wanted that particular bedroom. When she had first visited the Grange, before Mrs. Bevan's arrival, she had earmarked it for her own, with Miss Humphries in the smaller one next door, and she had been put out to find them both occupied by the family when the school took possession.

She had certainly lost no time in making the change. The warden's room also was now her private study, which as head mistress was her right, leaving the staff room to the other teachers. She had written already to a competent friend—a Miss Thompson—to come as assistant on the domestic side, and with Miss Stafford, the lady cook, Mrs. Griffiths who came daily, and two women from the cottages who gave certain hours for cleaning, she considered she could manage the household very well without a warden. Annie, Mrs. Bevan's maid, had returned to Axleford shortly after the arrival of the school. There was no one left therefore of the old regime, and she could make her own arrangements without interference.

One thing stood out before all others in Marian's mind. She would not be allowed now to go over to the Abbey and see Arthur whenever she liked. She felt she must let him know, and that at once. She dared not go to Miss Brookes and ask permission, for she was certain it would be refused. There was still half an hour before preparation, just time to make an unlicensed dash. Miss Brookes was in her study busy

writing, the other teachers would also be occupied. Now was the opportune moment. The window stood open. It was only the drop of a few feet to the ground. Without hesitation Marian took the plunge, climbed out and dodged under the lilac bushes, then, taking what cover she could, skirted through the garden and up to the Abbey. She found Arthur digging in his special allotment.

"Hello! You here again!" he greeted her.

"Yes, it's *most* important. Come into the barn. I want to tell you something!" panted Marian, much out of breath with running.

"Whatever is it now?"

"Oh, come along quick and I'll tell you. I can't stay more than a minute or two. *Do* hurry."

Arthur leisurely put down his spade and followed her inside the barn. He listened while she recounted what had happened since tea-time, and how Miss Brookes had seemed to assume a new character since their mother had gone.

"The old witch!" he commented.

"Yes, it means a change for us. And Artie, how are we going to meet now? I can't keep asking for leave to go and see you."

Arthur thought for a moment.

"I expect I'll have to dodge round and come and see you instead. Look here, I've an idea. You can see the farm from your garden? Well, my bedroom window faces your way."

"I thought you were in the big barn!"

"No, I'm not now. Mrs. Lowman had a boarder and he's gone, and she's put me in his small room over

84 Mystery of the Moated Grange

the porch. Well, my idea is that I'll hang a towel out of my window as a signal when I'm scouting down to see you, and you can meet me at some place we'll arrange."

"Oh, good! The best place will be that avenue behind the cowsheds that Mr. Carter said was called Sir Hugh's walk. The girls won't go there now, because they think he haunts it, and they're scared to death. We used to feed the fowls there, but since that lecture we feed them in the stableyard, always at six, before we go in to prep. If you could meet me in the avenue any day, say at five past six, I could easily bolt away and nobody would notice. They'd think I'd gone to fetch more Indian corn. Oh, Artie, what a ripping idea!"

"It seems feasible certainly. You'll see my signal if I'm coming, but what about *you* making a signal if you happen to want *me*?"

"Yes, that's important," said Marian, wrinkling up her forehead. "You can't see *my* window. Oh, I know! We all do some of our own bits of washing. I have a scarlet apron. Can you see the side fence of our garden from the Abbey? Yes? Well, when I want you I'll wash that apron and hang it on the fence. Nobody else has one made of Turkey red like mine, so it will be a good signal. That's arranged then?"

"Yes, we ought to be able to meet without your Miss Brookes or anyone else knowing, because I do feel that as Bevans we're responsible for the Grange. It's ours. It doesn't belong to all that crew of the school. Dad and Mums aren't here, so it's up to us to look after it. I still feel there's some mystery some-

where, though what it is I can't say. I want to find out, and you must help. One of the men on the farm has been telling me queer things about old Uncle Tristram, he seems to have been most extraordinary, first nearly bankrupt and then quite well off, but an absolute hermit, and nobody knows whether his son William is really dead or not."

"Had he a son?"

"Yes, so they say. A boy who ran away and never came back. You might ask Mrs. Griffiths about him. Find out all you can."

"I will, but Mrs. Griffiths is an oyster."

"I know, still there's no harm in asking. You might find papers in some of those cabinets."

"I'll try and look. After all they're *our* cabinets, not Miss Brookes'. And that reminds me I must scoot, or I shall be late for prep and get into an awful mess. Hope they haven't missed me! Ta-ta."

Marian, recalled to a remembrance of the hour, vanished and made her way under cover of trees and bushes back to the Grange, arriving just in time to slip in to preparation. Luckily for her her absence had not been noticed.

CHAPTER VII

Sunny June

Among the prefects appointed by Miss Brookes was Hester Stanway. She was a very good and conscientious girl, but rather puffed up with the importance of

86 Mystery of the Moated Grange

her new authority. As soon as preparation was over she tapped Marian on the shoulder.

"Marian!" she said briskly, "I peeped into the dormitory, where you've been moved, just before prep and I saw your drawers were open and in a fearful mess. You'd better go along and tidy them at once. Miss Laxon is sure to look in soon, and if she sees them in that muddle you'll get into trouble. Off you go, quick!"

Marian inwardly groaned. She had completely forgotten those drawers. Since she climbed out of the window she had never given a thought to them again. She resented Hester's tone, but realized the importance of the matter. She went therefore, and sitting on the floor began to try and make order out of the chaos of underclothes, handkerchiefs, scarves and other things which she had brought from Axleford. She was still sorting them out when Miss Laxon entered.

"Marian!" exclaimed the teacher. "Haven't you finished yet? What have you been doing? I told you to tidy your drawers before prep. Fold your clothes neatly and put them away. Dear me, you seem to have no sense of order. Why jumble handkerchiefs and photos and writing paper and stockings all together? You need a nurse!"

"Mummie always tidied my drawers," explained Marian.

"Did she indeed! Well, I'm sorry for her. She should have taught you better. A girl of thirteen ought to be able to look after her own clothes. You're no longer a baby. Now do as I tell you, and arrange them neatly. 'A place for everything and everything

in its place' is the motto, then you don't turn your drawer upside down when you want something. You should see some of the juniors' drawers. They're patterns of order. You've a good deal to learn, Marian, in many ways."

Miss Laxon stood over her giving directions until the last article was stowed away, then stalked off looking rather grim. She had not intended to waste so much time.

Marian keenly resented the reflections against her mother's training. It seemed a bad beginning for the very first day on which Mrs. Bevan had left. She wondered what Hilda's drawers were like. They could hardly be the patterns of order attributed to the other juniors unless someone had helped her to arrange them. She shook her head dismally.

"It seems to me things are going to be difficult now Mumsie has gone," she reflected. "The Grange is very much boarding school now. As for Hester, she's a jack-in-office. I can't see why I should take orders from a girl who's only a little more than a year older than I am. At Axleford High the prefects were all seventeen and in the Sixth. They were almost like mistresses. We could have some respect for *them*. Oh dear, I almost wish I was back at the High! No, I don't. The Grange is *ours* and I'll never forget that. I'm glad we're here, though I could do without the evacuees. I must look after Hilda and see that she's not put upon. Those prefects are going to be too much for us I'm afraid. As for Miss Laxon, if she makes any more rude remarks about Mumsie I shall flare up. I know I shall."

88 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Marian had expected gloomily that she would have a restless night in her new surroundings, but on the contrary she slept well, and woke next morning in a better temper. The sun was shining and the scent of flowers came through the open window. After all things were not so bad. Her room-mates too were jolly. They joked and chaffed one another and included her in the fun. While Mrs. Bevan was there they had held slightly aloof, but now that she had left they seemed to regard Marian as more one of themselves. She wondered if they had imagined she might go and sneak to her mother about any peccadillos they committed. Certainly she would never have done so, but now that it was impossible a shadow seemed removed.

Hilda, after her first outburst of tears, had settled down among the juniors and seemed surprisingly happy. Marian, ready to stand up for her sister and fight her battles, found Hilda quite nonchalant and indeed wanting to give the impression that she could now look after herself. Going into the juniors dormitory to see if Hilda's drawers really were in the apple-pie order reported by Miss Laxon, she found her sister's diary and took the liberty of reading it. It was rather a revelation.

June 4. Mumsie went away. I cried but the girls called me a silly so bucked up.

June 6. I like sleeping in my new dorm much better than with Marian. We have such fun. We had a pillow fight this morning.

June 7. Marian very motherly but don't want to be mothered at present. Must be kind to poor old Marian, however. Audley is the nicest girl I have ever met. Have agreed to be chums.

If listeners hear no good of themselves those who read diaries will certainly find no flattering remarks. Marian popped the book back inside the drawer in a hurry. Poor old Marian, indeed! What were younger sisters coming to? Hilda, whom she had always protected, directed and looked after, now appeared actually delighted to be on her own. Well! Let her! She must fight her own battles, and get out of her own scrapes. It would do her good. Perhaps she would realize sometime that an elder sister is an advantage, not an impediment. Poor old Marian, indeed!

"Artie and I go together," she thought. "I shan't tell that silly child anything about our trying to find out whether there's some mystery in connexion with the Grange. She'd only go blabbing to her new chum. I know her. She never can keep a secret."

Meanwhile Arthur had not hung a towel from his window or attempted to communicate with her. Perhaps boy-like he was absorbed with his own chums, and did not want to be bothered with a private meeting with a sister.

Her mother had written that she was now in full charge of the munition girls' hostel and found the work extremely interesting. Some of the north country lassies were a rough set, but she was able to cope with them, they had their points and responded to her

90 Mystery of the Moated Grange

treatment. It was undoubtedly a useful war job. She saw Daddy often, which was an immense solace to them both.

Mrs. Bevan had departed in such an extreme hurry that she had only had time to pack her own things and take them with her. When Miss Brookes took possession of the warden's room she found the big bureau and its drawers full of old letters and papers that had belonged to Mr. Tristram. Mrs. Bevan had really intended to sort these out, but had been too busy, and had kept putting the matter off. Miss Brookes wanted the drawers for her own correspondence and school records, so one day she emptied them into baskets, and with the help of Mrs. Griffiths carried them upstairs and threw them into a great oak chest that stood in an empty garret.

Marian, who chanced to see the removal, ventured a remonstrance.

"Are those Mother's papers?" she asked.

Miss Brookes, resenting her interference, replied sharply.

"Certainly not. They're only old lumber from the bureau. They'll be quite safe upstairs in the chest if they're ever wanted, but surely Mrs. Bevan must have locked up anything she didn't want to be disturbed. She can look these over herself when she returns. I *must* have the use of the bureau. What a pity it is people don't burn their old letters instead of accumulating them for years and years. I suppose these are all Mr. Tristram Bevan's correspondence."

"The envelopes are addressed to him sure enough," said Mrs. Griffiths in her gruff voice.

In Miss Brookes' opinion matters were now going on quite well at the Grange. Miss Thompson, her new domestic assistant, had arrived, and was a great help with the catering. The only difficulty was that with reduced scholastic staff the school time-table had not been too easy to arrange. There was no "Mademoiselle", and the French lessons had been made over to Miss Humphries, who had so many English classes that French was rather crowded out of the curriculum. It seemed a pity it should be neglected. Now Hester Stanway had spent a whole year in a school at Paris, and spoke the language fluently. Miss Brookes decided therefore that she might very well give some assistance to the Lower Seniors, and that on one morning a week they could read and translate a French story, which would improve their accent and add to their vocabulary, and that it would do Hester no harm thus to keep up her own proficiency by acting teacher. Hester herself was quite pleased by the importance and readily agreed.

It was only a moderate success. She was an exacting teacher, criticizing their accents, and making them read sentences over and over again. They would have accepted such comments from their former mistress, Mademoiselle Serulas, but coming from Hester they were inclined to giggle and even to rag her a little. She had not too much patience, and suspecting Patty of deliberately mistranslating a sentence she flung down the book, and complained to Miss Brookes. The result was a stern reprimand to the class, and a reminder that as they evidently could not be trusted to behave themselves the lesson would in future be

92 Mystery of the Moated Grange

held in a corner of the hall, where Miss Gerrard was instructing the juniors, and could preserve order. Two classes in one room was not too easy for either. The juniors caught snatches of French to interrupt their sums, and the Lower Seniors read and translated with half an ear for the arithmetic lesson. Still it was war time, and what else could be expected in an evacuated school.

It was difficult in that quiet place to realize that Britain really was at war. Except for the black-out and rationing things seemed quite normal. Occasionally a few planes flew overhead, but they were not enemy ones, and no alerts sounded at night. The main object of the district seemed to be to grow food. And at that both boys and girls helped. Squads from the Abbey and the Grange went to Mr. Lowman's fields to weed, and they had their own co-operative ventures in aid of the Red Cross Fund. There was a litter of pigs at the Abbey, and the Grange girls clubbed together and bought two of them. When they were old enough to leave the sow they carried them down squealing loudly, and put them in a sty near the stables. There were plenty of scraps in the kitchen to feed them on, with the addition of meal, that they subscribed to buy. A sitting of eggs was also put aside for the Red Cross, and the chickens when hatched were to be reared and finally sold in the market at Leomford.

The girls thoroughly enjoyed these country avocations. It was lovely June weather and they rose early. There were certain tasks that according to their evacuation rules they had to perform. They made

their beds, tidied and swept their dormitories, and "domestic squads" in turns washed up the breakfast things. Other squads helped Miss Stafford and Miss Thompson to peel potatoes and prepare vegetables, and the hens also had to be fed, for the school had taken over the care of the poultry. Old Amos Griffiths looked after a couple of cows, and attended to the garden. He was a surly old fellow, as grim as his wife, and appeared to resent the intrusion of the school. Having had the sole charge of the Grange for two years after the death of Mr. Tristram Bevan it was not to their interest to have to resign their position as caretakers. No doubt they had made many pickings while their reign lasted. Miss Brookes sometimes wondered why they stayed, but supposed they must consider their wages and use of the lodge worth their while.

Miss Gerrard, who had been games mistress at Ashmont, turned her attention from tennis and cricket, which were out of the question at Maenan, and concentrated on country pursuits. She was very keen on training the girls to observe birds and animals and to collect wild flowers. There was tremendous excitement when one evening at twilight, she caught a hedgehog in the garden. The little fellow seemed frightened at first to be examined and cooed over by so many human beings, who felt his prickly spines and even had the audacity to try to stroke his nose, but when he was placed in an empty pig-sty he condescended to eat some bread and milk put down for him, indeed he devoured it with appreciation.

"We'll keep him as a pet!" declared Miss Gerrard,

94 Mystery of the Moated Grange

proudly. "He'll soon get to know us and grow tame."

Alas for her hopes! When they visited the sty next morning their captive had vanished. A small neat hole showed where he had cleverly burrowed and had made his escape to his native wilds. It was a great disappointment, but it could not be helped, and after all the poor little fellow deserved his liberty.

They then turned their attention to the moat, and with some nets improvised from pieces of muslin and wire, they caught tadpoles and put them into a large bowl, hoping to see them develop legs and turn into frogs. They renewed the water daily to ensure that they had food, adding water weeds, but most mysteriously the numbers seemed to dwindle, and Miss Gerrard suggested that she feared they were cannibals and devoured one another. A few, however, survived, and one day they actually found three small frogs, complete with legs, squatting upon a piece of stone they had placed in the middle of the bowl.

"Doesn't it make you think of Thumbelina?" asked Beryl.

"Or the frog prince?" questioned Shirley.

"Let us put them down by the side of the moat," said Miss Gerrard, when all the juniors had seen and rejoiced over them. "They'll join their companions then, and have a happy life."

Other treasures fished from the moat were a pair of newts, queer little creatures like lizards, olive brown in tint on the upper side, with orange or vermilion and black spots on the underside, the hands having four fingers and the feet five toes, which gave them some-

what of a human appearance. These they placed in a bowl and kept for observation on a window seat in the house. Mrs. Griffiths grunted disapproval.

"You'll never keep efts!" she objected, efts being her country name for newts. "They'll climb out of that bowl when they take the fancy, and I don't care to go stepping on one."

She was right, for on the following morning they found Bobbie, as they had christened him, had clambered up the side of the window, and Peter was hiding in a corner of the room behind the door. So they too were returned to the grass at the moat side and escaped.

Bird observation Miss Gerrard found more difficult to compass, as, with so many girls about, the feathered songsters were apt to be frightened away. The juniors especially if they knew of a nest, could not resist the temptation to keep going to look at it, with the result that it was deserted. By strict injunctions she persuaded them in some instances to refrain from too ardent inspection, and they had the satisfaction of seeing a brood of young chaffinches take wing, and a greenfinch rear her nestlings.

One very fortunate event happened. There was a small arbour in the garden, where Alison and Janie sat one afternoon, studying their lessons. A pair of missel thrushes flew up and appeared as if they wished to drive the girls away, but as they sat perfectly still the birds seemed to think them harmless and began to build a very untidy nest in the bush over the arbour, finishing it in about an hour, when the hen, who must have been in a great hurry, laid an egg in it. On successive days she laid three more, then sat on them,

96 Mystery of the Moated Grange

and four gaping mouths were hatched. The parent birds by that time had grown so used to seeing girls inspect their operations that they appeared quite tame, and fed their young regardless of the human eyes that watched them. When the fledglings had feathered, the girls would sometimes take them out of the nest and nurse them in their hands, and even chopped up worms and popped them inside the open beaks. The youngsters seemed to take no harm, and one morning it was found they had flown away and the nest was empty.

“ He that hath found some fledged bird’s nest may know
At first sight, if the bird be flown:
But what fair dell or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown.”

quoted Miss Gerrard, from Vaughan’s beautiful poem “ They are all gone into the world of light ”, which the juniors were then learning.

Yes, it was a lovely time of year, and though some of the girls missed tennis, the country gave ample compensations. By careful watching and listening they learnt to distinguish the notes of many birds, and could tell which was the chiffchaff, the greater woodpecker, the yellow hammer, the chaffinch, the wood pigeon, the black cap or the owl. Wild roses were in full bloom, and many other lovely early summer flowers, orchises, campions, musk mallows and honeysuckle, which made the meadows and hedge-rows gay. They found brimstone and peacock and little blue butterflies on the flowers, and great dragonflies hovered over the moat, where at dusk bats flitted

to catch the moths. Cuckoos were calling the whole day long and had not yet begun to change their tune to a minor key.

Certainly Maenan Grange at this season was a naturalist's paradise. Birds, insects, animals, trees and flowers were in full enjoyment of the sunshine and as oblivious of the war as if it did not exist. All the surroundings of beauty seemed to weave a golden pattern into life. Evacuation was a decided success.

CHAPTER VIII

Strange Happenings

In spite of Miss Brookes' harangue on the folly of superstition the girls could not forget the occult element that the rector had introduced into his accounts of the Grange. It was all very well to dismiss his stories as mediæval legends. There was quite possibly a grain of truth in them, or else how had they originated?

"It was not worth anybody's while just to make them up," surmised Hazel, shaking her head solemnly, as a few of the lower seniors discussed the matter among themselves.

"There's never smoke without fire!" quoted Ethel.

"You may depend upon it *somebody* saw *something* in the passage, and if it wasn't Brother Ambrose it was some other spirit of some sort or another," propounded Muriel, not very lucidly.

98 Mystery of the Moated Grange

“ Ugh! I’m scared stiff at spooks. The idea gives me ten dozen shivers down my spine,” shuddered Lena.

“ There’s safety in numbers and I’m glad we sleep in dormitories,” remarked Bessie. “ I didn’t like it at first, eight beds in a room, as bad as a hospital I thought, but *now*, after what that clergyman told us, it’s the greatest comfort to know I can put out a hand and touch Mona, and even to hear Ethel snoring seems human somehow.”

“ I don’t snore!” snapped Ethel.

“ Yes you do!”

“ I *do not*! Nobody has ever accused me of it before.”

“ Well, when I woke up last night I most distinctly heard snoring, over by the window, and that’s *your* bed.”

“ Do ghosts snore?” faltered Mona.

“ Oh, I hope not. I never heard they did. Don’t they clank chains usually?”

“ That depends on the kind of ghost. I suppose they’re not all the same. But I can’t tell you whether they snore!” said Hazel.

“ Well, look here,” declared Bessie bravely. “ I’d like to get to the bottom of this. Does Ethel snore? Or is it a spook? If I hear that noise again to-night, that’s of course if I wake up, I shall jump up and investigate.”

“ How will you investigate?”

“ I’ll go to Ethel’s bed and if she’s snoring I shall shake her.”

“ Thank you!” sniffed Ethel. “ And if I’m not?”

"Then I'll find out who is—if it's Brother Ambrose himself!"

"You won't dare!"

"I bet you three chocolates I will!"

"You haven't any. It's a safe offer!"

"Haven't I? Dad sent me a whole box this very morning!"

"And you never told us! Oh, you mean thing!"

"Well I was saving them up for a sort of dormitory feast, you know."

"Anyhow you're not going to eat them all yourself, I hope."

The Grange, a dream of cheerful beauty in the sunshine, assumed a rather eerie aspect by night. The moat looked dark and gloomy, and the bushes round it made queer little murmurings in the breeze, as if they were whispering secrets. Owls hooted among the trees, and bats were fluttering round. Indoors the necessary black-out made the passages dim, with only a tiny oil lamp burning. In the dormitories, to give air, as soon as the girls were in bed, Miss Laxon would come in and draw away the curtains from the windows, and later the moon might shed a soft light, but moonshine is illusive and shimmery filtering into the room, and casts long shadows. At night-time Maenan Grange undoubtedly seemed a different place, haunted, if not by actual ghosts, but at any rate by memories of its historic past.

That particular evening the girls in the Lower Senior upper dormitory went to bed as usual and were soon asleep. Bessie amongst them slumbered peacefully for some time. Then about midnight she

100 Mystery of the Moated Grange

woke with a start. She sat up and listened, every nerve on the thrill. There was that noise again, it sounded like distinct snoring. Faint moonlight drifted through the window, and she could just see the outlines of the others' beds. Was it Ethel or was it not? Summoning all her courage she got up and crept across the room. Ethel was sound asleep and her breathing was calm and peaceful. Yet from close by the window came that queer snoring noise. There was no mistaking it. In a sudden panic she gave a squeal, and at once the others woke and sat up.

"What's the matter?" murmured sleepy voices.

"Don't you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"That snoring noise! Listen!"

They certainly did hear it, and it aroused them thoroughly.

"Oh! What is it?"

"I'm scared to death!"

"*Where* is it?"

"Oh! Fetch somebody!"

"I'm going for Miss Brookes!" declared Bessie.

Miss Brookes slept in the room vacated by Mrs. Bevan a little further along the passage. Bessie, barefooted and shivering with alarm fled like a ghost herself to the mistress's door, and thumped loudly enough to rouse the seven sleepers. The Head peeped out almost instantly.

"What's the matter?" she asked, amazed at the sight of a white-faced pupil.

"Oh, Miss Brookes. There's a queer noise in our room and we're all frightened!" gasped Bessie.

"I'll come and see. Just let me get my dressing-gown and my flash."

Much comforted by the company of the teacher, Bessie returned, and Miss Brookes, flashing her electric torch round the dormitory, confidently assured the girls that there was nothing there.

"But there is! That snoring noise! Listen!" wailed Mona.

Miss Brookes did listen, intently. Then she walked to the open window, leaned out and clapped her hands. There was a sound of whirring wings.

"Young owls, crooning in the ivy!" she explained. "It's nothing to be alarmed about. They always make that funny noise like snoring. I'll tell Amos Griffiths to fetch a ladder to-morrow and clip the ivy close round the window, then they won't find any snug place to come and perch here again."

"We thought it was a ghost!" sighed Muriel.

"Ghost? Nonsense! There are no ghosts here. It's a perfectly natural explanation. Now settle down and go to sleep again."

When Miss Brookes had taken her matter-of-fact departure, Ethel remarked: "You owe me three chocs, Bessie! I was *not* the snorer."

"Right-o!" agreed Bessie. "The box is in my drawer, and I vote we have a little feast now, just to calm us down. Half a moment while I get it. We'll each have one, and Ethel can have the other two I owe her to-morrow."

"Good old sport!" murmured Mona, as she munched her chocolate. "I could just do with a pick-me-up! You've solved the whole situation."

102 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"And my character's cleared. I *don't* snore!" repeated Ethel, on whom the imputation rankled.

If the seniors were still jumpy on the subject of uncanny noises and mysterious shadows the juniors were even more so. Nothing would now induce them to venture along Sir Hugh's Walk, even in the day-time, however much they dared one another. A mouse scuttling in the passage was construed as the footfalls of Brother Ambrose, and there was an idea that other unknown ancestors of the Bevan family might be encountered in the gloaming. The Drumming Well had been located in the field and they looked at it with superstitious reverence. It stood under a large hawthorn tree, and was a deep well, with a broken, moss-covered edge. As it was no longer used there was no bucket or windlass. When they peeped down, however, they could see a gleam of water at the bottom, which looked like a wicked little eye peering up. They thought they could readily believe in the gipsy's curse.

One afternoon Mary, Audley and Isobel and Shirley raced into the hall looking absolutely distraught, and panted out to a few girls who were gathered there the most astonishing piece of information.

"The Drumming Well's drumming!" shrieked Audley.

"Audley heard it herself!" added Mary.

"She ran back and told us!" declared Isobel.

"Her eyes stuck out like crabs', she was so scared. We daren't go near!" quavered Shirley.

"What does it mean? Is it a curse?" questioned Audley in terrified accents.

The news quickly spread through the school, and

little groups of girls ventured forth to the vicinity of the well, but by the time they got there the sound had ceased and there was nothing to be heard. A few brave souls even peeped down the well, but there was not even a gurgle, much less a drumming. They accused Audley of imagination, which she indignantly denied.

"I *did* hear it! I *did*!" she protested. "Just you wait, and see whether something's going to happen!"

The prefects, hearing of the matter, scoffed scornfully, and said those juniors were always getting up scares.

"Better not let Miss Brookes catch you talking such nonsense," reproved Beatrice. "You know how down she is on our believing silly things."

"The Drumming Well's only an old legend," added Moira.

The juniors took good care that the incident did not reach the ears of any of the teachers, but among themselves they agreed as to its credibility. Audley had attested its truth as solemnly as if she were in a witness box. Marian had her doubts, and slipping away quietly by herself she made a careful examination of the well head. What she found made her smile. A piece of dark string was tied round the trunk of the hawthorn tree, threaded through the grass and among the stones and disappeared inside the well. She drew it up gently, bit by bit, and finally raised at the end an old tin, probably containing a large pebble, for it rattled when shaken.

"The gipsy's drum, when you pull the string!" she chuckled. "Now I wonder who's responsible for

104 Mystery of the Moated Grange

this? It's rather like one of Patty's jokes. Or is it a rag the boys are playing on us? I shouldn't be surprised. They're quite capable of it. Shall I cut the string? No, on the whole I'll drop the tin back again and leave things as they are. I might have a little fun with it myself, now I know the secret. If the girls are such geese as to believe in the drumming, let them, that's all! I shan't tell anybody what I've found out."

So laughing again to herself she lowered the tin carefully, arranged twigs and leaves over the string, and went back unobserved to the house.

It was a few days after this that another and more inexplicable scare disturbed the Grange. The girls who slept in the dormitories on the ground floor began to hear strange noises during the night, a scuttling and scuffling in the passage, as if small feet were running along. Miss Laxon, who also occupied a room in that corridor, heard it too. Several times she opened her door, switched on her electric torch and peered out, but could see nothing. She consulted Miss Brookes, who airily pooh-poohed it, and suggested rats. But it did not sound like rats, the noises were distinctly like footsteps, almost as though a troop of fairies was passing by. The girls were growing quite hysterical about it, and were asking to be removed to the attics or anywhere, for they were certain the passage was haunted.

"That Drumming Well foretold something!" said Ethel mysteriously.

"I don't like living in a haunted house!" wailed Alison.

"If this goes on much longer I shall write and ask to be taken home!" declared Florence.

And Nora began to quote the poem by Walter de la Mare:

" 'Is there anybody there?' said the traveller,
Knocking on the moon-lit door."

"Oh, don't, don't! You'll make me scream!" exclaimed Freda.

Marian, who could perceive no explanation, was disturbed herself. After all *was* the old house haunted, and were there phantom listeners thronging the faint moonbeams? Ghosts of those who had dwelt there in long ago days, come back to guard its mysteries. She shivered at the idea.

Miss Laxon also did not like it, and she put the matter so strongly to Miss Brookes, urging that the girls were really alarmed and something should be done about it, that the Head suggested changing rooms with her, and investigating herself. So Miss Laxon, much relieved, moved upstairs, and Miss Brookes still protesting strongly against superstitious fancies, brought down her dressing-gown and toilet accessories and went to bed, with ears ready to pick up the least sound. She left the light on on a little table by her bedside, and taking a book of poetry began to read. She felt she must keep awake and on the *qui vive*. A novel might be too absorbing, but short poems would be just sufficiently interesting to banish slumber from tired eyes. For a long time nothing happened. She looked at her watch. It was ten minutes past one. She was almost deciding that the matter was

106 Mystery of the Moated Grange

only nonsense, and that she would go to sleep. She certainly could not keep vigil all night or she would be a wreck for to-morrow's strenuous duties. "It's probably their imagination," she surmised.

So she blew out the candle and settled comfortably on her pillow. Yet sleep refused to come. In spite of fatigue she could not really settle down. All the time she realized she was listening keenly. It was the darkest hour of the night and there was no moon. The silence was intense. The owls that generally hooted round the house had flown away to catch their prey elsewhere.

And then suddenly she sat up in bed. What was that sound in the passage? A sort of rustling, not the scampering of rats or mice, but something quite different. She felt for the lamp and switched on the light. Then she opened the door cautiously and peeped out. There was nothing—nothing whatever. She walked along the passage for a short way, but all now was in dead silence. Half consciously she gave a shiver, then pulled herself together.

"Nonsense! I mustn't get nervy!" she determined. "I expect there's quite a natural explanation. I must try and find that out to-morrow. All the same I hope the noise won't come again. I wonder if it disturbed the girls."

She listened at their doors, but as there was no sound she presumed they had not awakened, so she returned to her own room, got into bed, switched out the light, and after a long time of listening, during which nothing more happened, she at last fell asleep.

Next morning Miss Laxon asked her whether she

had heard anything in the night, and she confessed that she had.

"It probably has quite a natural explanation," she declared, "and I mean to find out what it is. Luckily the girls weren't disturbed. I listened at their doors and all was quite quiet."

"But they *did* hear something," maintained Miss Laxon. "They tell me that some of them woke and were too frightened even to speak. There's quite a panic amongst them. We must clear up the mystery, or arrange to move them to other dormitories."

"I don't see where we could put them. Every available room upstairs is full!" mused Miss Brookes.

"May I bring down a bed to-night to your room, and we'll investigate together?"

"If you like. Certainly we must do something about it. I have an idea. It may prove a solution."

There happened to be a spare camp-bed, so Miss Laxon set it up in her former room, feeling that something must be done to calm the panic, and that she and the head mistress together might find out what happened in the passage at dead of night. Perhaps Miss Brookes, strong-minded though she appeared, was not altogether sorry to have the support of a fellow-teacher in her investigations. She made no objection when Miss Laxon brought down the camp-bed and set it up. She had a plan of her own and it would be as well to have a witness. She confided it later on, and they agreed it might be successful.

So, having soothed the girls, and told them they were probably apt to imagine noises, they waited till eleven o'clock, when the occupants of the dormitories

ought to be sound asleep. Then they took dredgers from the kitchen, and sprinkled flour over the entire length of the corridor. They retired to bed themselves though they left the light on and sat reading instead of closing their eyes. It was a weary vigil. They were both very tired, especially Miss Brookes, who had slept little the night before. Miss Laxon had almost dropped off to sleep, and Miss Brookes, in spite of determined efforts, felt her eyes closing. Then suddenly it came—the strange pattering sound they had both heard before. Instantly they were wide awake and on the alert. They jumped up, and seizing flashlights flung open the door. There was nothing to be seen, no troop of pixies had invaded the Grange, but switching their torches on to the floor they saw traces in the flour that they had spread.

“There! I told you! Rats!” exclaimed Miss Brookes.

Miss Laxon was examining the prints with close attention.

“No, these aren’t rats!” she declared. “I took tracking when I went in for my Guides’ certificates, and I could swear these were made by rabbits.”

“Rabbits?”

“Yes, they must have made an entrance while the house was unoccupied. There’s probably a hole somewhere where they can get in. I’ve heard of them invading old houses before.”

“I’ll send Amos Griffiths in the morning to investigate.”

“Well, I’m glad we’ve cleared that up at any rate.”

Their voices in the passage, though they had spoken quietly, had aroused the girls, doors were opened and frightened faces peeped out. Miss Brookes thought it wise to explain the situation at once.

"Behold us acting Sherlock Holmes!" she laughed. "We sprinkled flour on the floor, and these are the traces of our supposed spooks. Look for yourselves! Miss Laxon has studied tracking, and she says they're plainly the footprints of rabbits. That's nothing to be frightened at, is it? All the same we'll get Griffiths to find their holes and stop them up. We don't want them as midnight visitors any more. What with baby owls and bunnies we can have too much nature here."

"Did you think of putting flour on the floor?" asked Alison.

"Of course we did. It's an old tracker's dodge. I expected rats, but Miss Laxon knows better."

"I got one of my Guides' certificates on Tracks," explained Miss Laxon. "I couldn't possibly be mistaken."

"Now go back to bed, and sleep undisturbed by 'ghosties and ghoulies and things that go bump in the night' for you see there's a perfectly natural explanation here," advised Miss Brookes.

Amos Griffiths, called in next morning to inspect the tracks, agreed at once that they were made by rabbits that had invaded the lower portion of the Grange. He managed to find the holes, and stopped them with broken glass mixed with cement, and he promised to bring along a ferret to operate from the outside and try to exterminate some of the rabbits.

"They do be a pest, not but what they're handy

110 Mystery of the Moated Grange

for a stew," he grunted. "As for ghosts, I never saw none, and we slept here two years as caretakers. I don't believe in 'em myself!"

CHAPTER IX

Across the Border

The Rev. Howard Carter had not forgotten his promise to take some members of the school for a ramble. As the weather was so fine he arranged that on the following Saturday afternoon he would act guide, and would conduct a party to the Druids' Circle on Caradoc Edge, a mountain situated over the border in Wales. It would be a long tramp, so he suggested that only good walkers should be allowed to go, as they would need to step out and could not be hindered by waiting for younger ones trailing behind.

"I once tried to escort an Antiquarian Society," he explained, shaking his head. "I shall never forget it! They evidently did not know what they were in for. There were elderly gentlemen, and ladies not used to climbing hills. They kept sitting down to rest, and I had the greatest difficulty to collect them and urge them to go forward. I admit it's a stiff climb to the Circle, but we never got there. They gave in before the last hill. It was certainly a very hot day. They sank down on a grassy bank, and declared they couldn't walk a step farther, and they'd take the Druids' re-

mains on trust. They had brought thermos flasks and buns, so they had a picnic tea where they were, instead of at the circle, as was intended. They seemed to enjoy it, and their president made a speech apologizing for not reaching their goal, but saying the scenery was enough compensation. As a society they were accustomed to take excursions by charabanc. They had not realized the difficulty that a mountain walk entailed. Well! Well! It's live and learn, isn't it? I'm cautious now whom I include in my rambles."

"We won't burden you with slackers this time," laughed Miss Brookes. "Only seniors, guaranteed to keep the pace, shall be allowed to go. You'll admit me I hope to the party. I've done plenty of climbing in Switzerland, so I'm not quite a raw recruit. Miss Gerrard, our games mistress is very athletic and may be included. What about the boys at the Abbey?"

"I've asked Mr. Derrick, and he will bring about half a dozen of them. The rest prefer a cricket match in Leomford. I advise you to provide each girl with a sandwich to take in her pocket. There's no possible place to obtain tea, and we may not be back till late."

"A good idea. I'll certainly do so. Then they can have supper when they return. Where are we to meet you to start?"

"At Cleland Priors Farm. I can leave my car there. And two o'clock prompt please!"

"I assure you we won't be late."

When the news of the ramble leaked out the whole school clamoured to join, and Miss Brookes had to explain firmly that juniors would be a drag upon the party, and that even among seniors only those considered

112 Mystery of the Moated Grange

by Miss Gerrard to be sufficiently athletic might be selected. It was no use to take girls who would perhaps give in half-way, and have to be escorted home by a teacher, who would thus miss the excursion herself. Miss Humphries would stop behind at the Grange with those who remained, and some other festivity would be arranged for them.

Miss Humphries, who considered herself an excellent walker, was not at all pleased to be left out of the ramble. She was not particularly interested in the Druids' Circle as an antiquity of the neighbourhood, but Mr. Derrick was going, and she was certainly interested in Mr. Derrick. To remain behind and entertain the juniors was one of the snags of being only an assistant mistress. She was already contemplating leaving at the end of the term and taking up a war job. Evacuation in her opinion was very dull.

Among the girls chosen for the excursion were the prefects, nearly all the Upper Seniors, and some of the lower seniors, including Marian, Janie, Florence and Nora. Escorted by Miss Brookes, and Miss Gerrard they started off in good time, and were joined at the Abbey Gate by Mr. Derrick and seven boys, among whom were Arthur, Janie's brother Peter, and Nora's brother Jack. These kept together steadfastly at first, affecting to ignore the girls, but their sisters laughed, knowing there would be plenty of opportunities for chats with them later on.

"Bashful, poor darlings!" remarked Janie.

"Frightened of so many females!" chuckled Nora.

"Well, there aren't enough of them to go round!" agreed Marian. "Perhaps they were afraid they'd

each be asked to look after one of us, and they're counting us out and calculating how many of us would be allotted to each of them, like a knight of old, you know, with distressed maidens, if we got tired and had to be helped along."

"Helped along indeed! I'm as good a walker as Jack any day," snorted Nora.

"There's Mr. Carter!"

"So he is, waving to us!"

"He's rather a sport, isn't he?"

"A perfect old dear, I call him."

Arrived at the meeting-place, they started off in a brisk procession, led by the rector and Miss Brookes, with Mr. Derrick and Miss Gerrard at the rear to prevent straggling.

"Won't Miss Humphries be feeling jealous!" twinkled Janie mischievously. "She'd have given anything to go."

"She's not really so nice as Miss Gerrard in my opinion," grunted Nora.

"No, but she's prettier, and she knows it too."

"Well, she may stay at home as far as I'm concerned. I've no use for her."

"Same here. I wasn't pleased when I heard she was coming with us to the Grange. I'd rather have had Miss Forster or even Miss Ellis."

"Oh, Miss Forster! *She's* gone to do war work at a camp. And Miss Ellis went with the Sixth."

"Your school was divided up, wasn't it?" asked Marian.

"Yes, almost chopped in half as you might say. At any rate nearly a third must have gone with Miss

114 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Lancaster and some stayed on at the old High, with Miss Jessop.—We weren't all evacuated."

"I didn't want to go at first. I begged and begged Dad to let me stay, but he said he wouldn't chance another raid," remarked Florence, who had joined them.

"How did *you* manage to creep in among us, Marian?" asked Nora.

"I've told you over and over again only you never listen!" declared Marian indignantly. "We'd just come to live at the Grange, and you were all billeted upon us, because it's such a big place."

"You don't sound too hospitable!"

"Oh, I'm not grumbling. I suppose you had to be put somewhere."

"I wanted to go to Scotland," said Janie. "I have an aunt in Edinburgh, who offered to take me. I'm to spend the hols with her, and if I can wangle Dad I don't mean to come back here in September. I'd love to go to school in Edinburgh. This is only a kind of second best."

"Safe from raids anyhow!" sniffed Nora, who had no such glorious prospect as education in Edinburgh to which to look forward.

Chatting thus they walked along lanes and across fields and over stiles till they reached the great grass covered earthwork which was the remains of Offa's Dyke. Here the rector called a halt, and motioning the party to come near, so that they could hear him, he began to explain its significance.

"This was the ancient border between England and Wales. In the latter half of the eighth century,

Offa, who was ruler of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia, caused an immense earthen barrier to be erected from Chester to the Wye, as a defence against the Welsh, much as the French constructed their Maginot Line in an effort to keep the Germans out of France. Later another earthwork called Watt's Dyke was thrown up, and it is somewhat difficult sometimes to distinguish between the two. This portion, however, has always been called Offa's Dyke, and legend makes history.

"All round here was generally a scene of great struggles. The wild Welsh would come pouring over the border, to be engaged by Saxon warriors. It is said that Harold Godwin fought here before he was king. More than a thousand years ago the Danes tried to conquer the Marches, and the Welsh repulsed the invaders in many a battle, the memories of which lingered for centuries.

"An Elizabethan poet wrote about this:

'There is a famous thing
Called Offa's Dyke, that reacheth far in length,
All kind of war the Danes might thither bring.
It was free ground, and called the Britaine's strength.
Wat's Dyke likewise about the same was set,
Betweene which two bothe Danes and Britaines met,
For trafficke still; but passing boundes by sleight
The one did take the other prisoner streight.'

Can you imagine it? For a time a supposed peace, and each side doing some trading, the Welsh probably bringing sheep, and skins to exchange for fruit and grain grown in the fertile lower land. Then suddenly

116 Mystery of the Moated Grange

probably by night, the Welsh approaching secretly and swarming across the Dyke, the Danes aroused, and seizing their swords and shields, and a terrible battle following. Over there that hollow is called 'the Danes' grave' and the farmer told me that once when he was ploughing he found rusty bits of metal that may have been portions of armour. Unfortunately he did not keep them. I've asked him if he ever turns up any more to be sure to bring them to me.

"Now we must continue our tramp. When we've walked across this next field we shall have crossed the border and shall be in Wales."

The mountains were in front of them, and they began to climb. Soon leaving the cultivated ground they were on the bare moorland, covered with short grass and bracken and gorse bushes, where small Welsh sheep were finding scanty pasture, and plovers flew away uttering their plaintive cries. It was very beautiful, and the air was so fresh and bracing after the heat lower down that they felt they could walk for miles without feeling tired. So long as they followed their leader there was no need now to keep in procession, as they had done in the lanes. Their former groups broke up, and Marian found herself quite unobtrusively joined by Arthur.

"Hello! I don't seem to have seen you for ages!" she greeted him. "You never hung out your towel."

"And you never hung out your red apron!"

"I did! I suppose you didn't see it."

"No, I must have been away on the farm. Did you want me?"

“Not for anything particular, as it happens. I’ll tell you what it was.”

Marian related the incident about the mysterious footsteps and how they had turned out to be rabbits. Arthur laughed heartily.

“I expect it caused a scare. The girls will always be on the look out for ghosts. By the by did you ask Mrs. Griffiths if she knew anything about William Bevan?”

“Yes, but she was grumpy as usual, and wouldn’t say anything. I couldn’t get a word out of her.”

“I’ll ask Mr. Carter if I can find an opportunity.”

“Oh, do. He’s sure to know if anyone does. I wish, Artie, you’d come down to the Grange sometimes.”

“Well, now the Mater’s gone, I don’t like to barge in among that crew of girls. But if you really have anything important to say and hang your red flag out as an S.O.S. I’ll sneak down to Sir Hugh’s Walk. But please don’t unless it’s urgent. Understand?”

“All right. I won’t be a nuisance.”

There was no time then to say more, for Janie and her brother joined them and the conversation became on general topics. Peter had spent holidays in Scotland, and began to contrast the Highlands with the Welsh mountains, decidedly in favour of the former, while Arthur, who had never been north of the Tweed, maintained that nothing could beat the present scenery. The argument continued for some miles.

Their next halt was at some fragments of a wall which the rector declared was the ruin of one of the strongholds of Owen Glendower.

118 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Who was Owen Glendower?" asked one of the boys.

"A great leader of Wales, and almost as much a hero of legend as King Arthur. In the time of Henry IV he tried to assert the independence of the principality. As he was a descendant of Llewelyn he proclaimed himself Prince of Wales, and the whole country flocked to him. Henry never succeeded in putting him down thoroughly. For years he and his Welsh troops carried on a guerrilla warfare. They decoyed the English to follow them into the mountains, but the weather was bad, and food scarce, the soldiers suffered greatly, and were constantly harried by the Welsh, who could sally forth and then retreat to their own refuges.

"In 1402 Owen Glendower captured Lord Grey in an ambush and received 10,000 marks for his ransom. He made an alliance with Charles VI of France, but the French gave him no substantial aid, and he had to continue to carry on his guerrilla warfare, having all kinds of wonderful escapes. He tried to invade Shropshire, but he was driven back into his native mountains, and after a life of thrilling adventure he died in 1415. He was very brave and patriotic, though in *Henry IV*, Act III, Shakespeare makes him a boaster. Any of you who have read the play will remember Glendower brags:

' At my nativity
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets, and at my birth
The frame and huge foundations of the earth
Shaked like a coward.'

Hotspur jeers at his pretensions and Mortimer tries to make peace. Then Glendower says those oft-quoted lines:

‘ I can call spirits from the vasty deep,’

and Hotspur retaliates:

‘ Why, so can I, or so can any man;

But will they come when you do call for them?’

I advise you to study *Henry IV* if you want to know the history of those times.”

They had not yet reached their goal, and they went on again, up, up, up, towards Caradoc Edge. So far Miss Brookes had generally been walking with the rector, but now she fell behind to encourage some of the girls who seemed inclined to flag. It was certainly a steep climb. Arthur and Marian ran on, and joined themselves to Mr. Carter. It seemed an opportunity to catch him for at least a few minutes without a crowd round him. Arthur blurted out his question almost at once.

“ I wonder if you knew our cousin, William Bevan?”

“ Oh, yes, yes,” replied the rector. “ I knew Willie Bevan, poor lad. I always liked him. He ought to have had better chances in life. His father was very hard with him. Pity his mother died so early.”

“ He ran away, didn’t he?”

“ Yes, unfortunately. There was a quarrel between him and his father.”

“ Where did he go?”

“ Nobody knows, though it was rumoured he went

120 Mystery of the Moated Grange

to Canada. He never wrote to anyone at home afterwards, certainly not to me, though I'd gladly have helped him if I could. My wife and I were fond of Willie in those days. It's more than twenty years ago now. Dear me, how time flies. He was a fine boy, a true Bevan in type. Not so unlike you, by the by. You rather remind me of him."

"Am I the Bevan type then?" asked Arthur quickly.

"Yes, there's certainly a resemblance. I noticed it when I first saw you."

"*Do you think William is really dead?*"

The rector looked at the boy keenly.

"If I could tell you that it would save the lawyers a great deal of trouble!" he replied.

And at that moment unfortunately three boys overtook them and immediately began to ask questions about Owen Glendower. Their private conversation was quite interrupted. Arthur and Marian fell back by themselves.

"What does he mean: 'Save the lawyers a great deal of trouble'?" asked Marian.

Arthur was frowning.

"Well, as far as I can make out from things I've picked up from men at the farm, there's a mystery about William. No one really knows whether he's dead or alive. If he's alive he's the heir, but if he's dead the estate should be Dad's."

"Do you mean that the Grange isn't *really* Dad's?"

"I believe that's the state of the case."

"Oh! I thought when we came here it was *ours*!"

"So did I. But you remember Dad was funny about it. We heard him say something about a gamble."

"How a gamble? I don't understand."

"No more do I exactly. I suppose he's the heir, unless William turns up."

"And if he does?"

"Then *we* should have to turn out!"

"Oh, dear! Just when we've got to love the place."

"Well it's no use worrying about it. Who knows what may happen?"

A group of girls came hurrying up to them, eagerly pointing out that they could see the circle on Caradoc Edge. Arthur and Marian had been too absorbed to notice, but they could now perceive several great stones outlined against the sky on the summit of the hill they were climbing. The sight made everybody put on a spurt. Even those whose footsteps had flagged forgot they were tired. There was almost rivalry who should reach there first. The last piece was very steep, and over rocky ground. They scrambled up, and at last, panting and out of breath, they raced one another on to an even plateau, surrounded by a circle of immense standing stones. It was a magnificent site for a pagan place of worship, so remote and so high up, and surrounded by a panorama of mountains. Surely it must have brought heaven very near if the aims of the worshippers were spiritual.

They all sat down on the short grass to rest and to eat the sandwiches which they had brought, and which they had reserved for a picnic, instead of opening the tempting packages sooner. There was nothing to drink, but they could find streams on the way down again. The provisions vanished only too quickly.

122 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Then the rector stood up and began to explain what was known about the place.

“It’s called the Druids’ Circle, but it may be much older than the days of that religious body some of whose customs were recorded by Julius Cæsar. The Druids indeed date back to far antiquity, but we know little about them, as they committed nothing to writing, all their instruction to their priests and neophytes was by word of mouth and under strict secrecy. Yet in the dim past some devotees reared these mighty stones, probably as a temple for sun-worship. How they did so is a mystery.

“Geologists say the rock they’re composed of is not the same as in the mountains here, and must have been brought from a great distance. How they were transported and put in their places is almost incredible. They must weigh many tons and in those times there were none of our modern appliances. One theory is that inclined planes of earth were made, and the stones dragged up with ropes, pulled by hundreds of men. Another theory is that they were erected by people of a long forgotten age who came from the vanished continent of Atlantis, people of a high civilization, who understood secrets of levitation that we have not yet discovered, and who possibly built the pyramids in Egypt.

“Local legends of course had their own ways of solving the problem. One says that they were people who came here for a walk on Sunday, and were turned into stone as a judgment for breaking the Sabbath, and that they whisper to one another on Midsummer’s Eve. Another says that the devil was playing quoits

among the hills, and threw the stones to show his prowess.

"However the menhirs were erected and by whom, they were almost surely for the purpose of sun-worship. We can imagine that on the longest day of the year priests and people would assemble here, probably to offer sacrifice to ensure prosperity. It must have been a strange sight. The folk-memory of it lingers in legends. Some say that witches used to fly on broomsticks and hold their meetings here. A happier story is that the fairies dance round the circle on moonlight nights.

"In any case a supernatural atmosphere is ascribed to the place. It was said that if you slept up here, alone, on Midsummer's Eve, you could foretell the future. Well, I've never done that, yet I can foretell it sufficiently now to say that it's going to rain before long. Look at those clouds! If we don't want a soaking we must make a move, and go down to where we may perhaps find some shelter."

The sky had indeed suddenly grown very dark, and heavy clouds were rolling across. It was unwise to stay any longer guessing at the secrets of the stones. With one accord they began their descent.

Naturally it was far quicker going down than coming up. They hurried along, and had just reached the part where a thick undergrowth began when the storm broke. There was a flash of lightning, a loud peal of thunder and then a deluge of rain. They tried to creep among the gorse bushes to find shelter. Arthur and Marian, seeing a slight hollow under a stunted tree, pushed through some brambles and

124 Mystery of the Moated Grange

squatted down on the ground. Jack followed them, and shoved Arthur, asking for more room. Then an extraordinary thing happened—Arthur, moving on, suddenly disappeared among the brambles, as if swallowed up.

“Hello! Where have you got to?” shouted Jack.

“Down here!” replied a muffled voice.

Jack crept along cautiously, and found a large hole among the rocks, through which Arthur had apparently tumbled.

“Are you hurt?” he asked.

“No. I seem to have fallen into a kind of cave, but it’s dark down here.”

“I’ll fetch somebody.”

Telling Marian to be careful and not to move, Jack went for assistance, and presently Mr. Derrick and the rector came to investigate. The former managed to climb down, and taking an electric torch from his pocket dispelled the darkness, and called up that there was a large cave down below. So Mr. Carter also descended, and found that indeed there was an extensive cavern, with rocky roof, floor and walls. He was immensely excited.

“Owen Glendower’s cave!” he exclaimed. “There’s a story that he escaped and hid fifty men in a cave among these very mountains, but no one knew where. What a lucky find.”

“May I come down too?” begged Marian, who was peering from the top.

“Better not. It may be difficult to climb up again,” said Mr. Derrick. “Don’t let the whole party follow us.”

"No, no," agreed the rector. "We'll come here again by ourselves and explore."

"Jack!" shouted Mr. Derrick, "be ready to give us a hand. We're coming up."

It was a scramble to emerge, and their clothes were covered with earth. It was certainly not a place to which to conduct the rest of the party. The rector, however, was triumphant. To him it was the antiquarian discovery of a lifetime. He blessed the storm and deluge that had caused them to seek shelter. The rain was still falling, though not so heavily. It did not seem worth while to wait. He carefully marked the spot where the entrance was, so that he could find it again, then collecting his scattered flock from among the gorse bushes, he led the way on.

The thunder had ceased, but the rain continued, and they all got exceedingly wet. The news of the cave was passed from mouth to mouth, and many of the girls regretted they had missed the opportunity of going down to see it. It would have been a splendid adventure.

They reached the Grange soaked through, and had to change all their clothing before they assembled in the hall for the welcome supper that was ready.

"Did you enjoy the ramble?" asked Miss Humphries wistfully. She had spent a dull afternoon taking the juniors a walk in the meadows by the river, and felt aggrieved. And all the seniors with one accord answered:

"It was marvellous!"

CHAPTER X

Among the Prefects

Though Maenan Grange was in such a remote and peaceful spot, away from air raids, the girls could not forget the war. Many of them had fathers or elder brothers in the army or air force. Anne's father had gone with his unit to the East. She was anxiously awaiting a letter from him.

"Save me the stamp, won't you, old sport?" begged Irene. "I'm collecting."

"So am I," snapped Anne. "But I don't mind swopping a few with you, if you'll show me your book. Exchange is no robbery."

Hester's brother had just got his wings and was at an aerodrome near Bristol. She was very proud of him, though a little anxious.

"Mother's terrified he may be sent on a raid over Berlin," she explained, "and be reported missing. Of course he's wild to go, and have a shot at Hitler, as he says. All the boys like the air force."

"Yes, my brother is only sixteen, and he's just living until he can learn to fly," added Moira.

The Upper Seniors rather "kept themselves to themselves". Though most of them were little more than a year older than the Lower Seniors they felt in a superior position. This was particularly so with the prefects, Beatrice, Moira, Irene, Anne, Lucy and Hester. Each had been relegated for certain special

duties, such as supervision of dormitories, seeing that girls on the various rotas of domestic help turned up in time, that rooms used for classes were left tidy, or that those on what were called the outdoor squads, who weeded the garden or fed the poultry, attended to their business promptly and regularly. They had to round up slackers, hurry dawdlers, and report anybody who persistently seemed to shirk, or to evade rules.

On the Monday after the expedition to the Druids' Circle they held a Prefects' meeting during the half-hour before tea. They chose a cosy spot for their confabulations, a little arbour in the garden, where they could be in the open air and yet retired and out of hearing.

As was perhaps only natural, they immediately began to air their grievances.

"I'm getting fed-up with my kitchen squad," complained Moira. "Some of them say a fortnight is too long for their rota and it ought only to be a week, but Miss Laxon arranged that, *I* didn't, and it's *I* who have to enforce it. That wretched Ethel is always behind time, says she's washing her hands or something, and comes lounging in looking sulky. Says she never had to wash up plates at home. I dare say you didn't, I told her, but please remember you're *evacuated* and you came here on the distinct understanding that you gave 'domestic help', just as if you were in camp. I've no patience with her!"

"If they'd ever been to a camp they'd *know*," added Lucy. "Now when I went with the Guides to Cornwall last summer I fetched water and peeled potatoes and helped to cut sandwiches and——"

128 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Beatrice, stopping Lucy's flow of reminiscences. "We've all had some camp experience ourselves. The point is how to rub it in to those who haven't."

"They're so careless," continued Moira, who had not finished her complaints. "Enid dropped a tray this morning and broke six cups and saucers. She never even said she was sorry, just stood and gaped. Miss Stafford was furious, declared she'd report her. I believe she did too, and I hope Enid got a scolding from Miss Brookes. Do her good if she did."

"I found my poultry squad wasting the corn," proclaimed Anne. "Instead of measuring it out properly they were just grabbing handfuls and scattering it anyhow to the fowls. You know how expensive it is now, and it's rationed too."

"You should have measured it out for them yourself!" grunted Hester. "Surely that was your job?"

"I do generally, but I was delayed by something, and they'd scuttled on before me."

"Your fault then!"

"I don't see that!" Anne's voice was bristling with indignation.

"Oh, come, Hester, Anne's generally up to the mark!" interposed Beatrice. "What about yourself?"

"Thanks! I need a few kind words!" came from Anne's still ruffled voice.

"My trouble is with Dorm IV," said Hester. "I fancy they've concocted some sort of silly secret society. I peep in and find them hopping out of bed when they ought to be asleep, and they make signs to one another that they think are mysterious—as if I didn't see them,

the young idiots! Hilda's the worst of them, quite the ringleader in fact. I always thought those Bevans would give trouble. She actually had the impudence to tell me that I wasn't fifteen yet, as if that mattered. I jolly well sat on her, I assure you, little monkey!"

"Well? What's to be done about it all?" asked Irene.

"Yes, it's no use just grouching," said Beatrice thoughtfully.

"Ask Miss Brookes to give a sort of general lecture against slackness?" suggested Anne.

"Um—doesn't that rather seem as if we can't use our own authority as prefects?" questioned Hester. "If we put the matter to Miss Brookes she might look at it in that way."

"Yes, so she might. Perhaps the reformation idea ought to come from us?"

"But how?"

Beatrice shrugged her graceful shoulders. For the moment her brain lacked likely ideas. She was good at administrative work but no born organizer.

"I'm afraid we shall have to let things go on as they are," she sighed. "We must each round up our young sinners as best we can, and report them if they get too bad."

"Miss Brookes doesn't encourage too much reporting!"

"No, she says use your influence!"

"And appeal to their sense of duty!"

"And to their nice feeling!"

"Well, well, we're doing all that, I'm sure. Only it doesn't always come off, somehow."

130 Mystery of the Moated Grange

They were interrupted by the sound of the first gong, furiously belaboured by Miss Laxon at the front door to recall scattered members who were out in the garden.

"Tea!" pronounced Beatrice thankfully, rising and putting an end to the meeting. "Come along!"

Though she was head prefect, she took her responsibilities more casually than some of the others. After all it was Miss Brookes who wielded chief authority and ought to see to it if things went wrong.

Hester pursed up her lips as she followed. She was determined that in her department at any rate there should be no slackness shown. Those juniors in Dorm IV must be brought to heel. She would show that she, if she alone, knew the duties of a prefect. The main thing was somehow to catch them out. She must be on the watch and await her opportunity.

In the meantime the juniors were thoroughly enjoying themselves in their own way. Led by Hilda they had formed a secret society, the main objects of which were indefinite, but the running of which consisted of signs and countersigns, supposed to mystify their elders, and of private jollifications in dormitory No. 4 and dormitory No. 7, when they were considered to be slumbering in bed. Any girl whose relatives sent her a box of chocolate biscuits was in honour bound to summon the rest to a dormitory feast, and, heroically abstaining from sampling them first, to share the dainties round equally without favour.

Hilda, one morning, received a parcel from her father, containing an attractive assortment of fancy biscuits, and as Miss Humphries happened to be too

busy to notice it, she stowed it away in a drawer. The juniors were at present reading Scott's poems in class, and they had been immensely thrilled by the mention of the fiery cross which had summoned the clans to battle. They adopted the idea, and burning pieces of wood tied two together to form a charred cross, and passed this trophy solemnly on from one to another with the words "Dorm 4, when the moon shines through the window."

Dormitories 4 and 7 were on the same landing and faced south. The moon, just past its full, was rising about half-past eleven. To obtain plenty of fresh air the black-out curtains were not drawn at night, and the windows were open. Bright moonlight therefore flooded into the rooms where the girls were in bed. Certain of them had been chosen as sentries to keep awake and to rouse the others.

Hester, having noticed suspicious signs among her juniors, looked in last thing before she went to her own dormitory, but they were all apparently asleep, whether foxing or not she could not ascertain. She closed the door softly, and went away. She was on the same landing, so might hear if anything happened.

"I've sharp ears. If they're up to their tricks I'll soon be after them," she resolved.

The sentries in Numbers 4 and 7 awaited the moon rise with some impatience. It seemed long in coming, but it was a fine night, with no clouds, and at last the pale beams began to shine into the room.

Hilda and Audley got up, woke the others, then stole down the passage as softly as ghosts to No. 7 to summon them to the banquet. When they were all

132 Mystery of the Moated Grange

collected they sat on the beds, giggling but trying not to make a noise, and Hilda handed the box round.

Now Nellie and Isobel happened to be sitting on the window-seat. The former glanced out into the moonlit garden, and suddenly stopped crunching her biscuit, stiffened, nudged her neighbour and whispered "Look!"

Isobel did look, and gasped. Among the shadows in the garden two figures were approaching, one too dark to distinguish, but the other, just caught by a glint of the moonshine, was a lady in the old-fashioned costume of the reign of Charles II.

"Oh—o—oh! Is it Mistress Dorothy?" whispered Isobel, shivering visibly.

"What's the matter?" asked several voices.

"We've seen a ghost!" quavered Nellie.

"Where?"

"Out there in the garden. Oh, it's there still. Come and look."

Several brave spirits approached and peered through the window. The figures were still to be seen in the shadow of the trees.

"I told you Mistress Dorothy would come back!" faltered Beryl.

"Oh, I don't like ghosts!" whimpered Mary.

"I always said the Grange was haunted," moaned Kathleen. "I won't stay here! I'll write and ask to go home."

Even Hilda, after a peep outside, turned away looking decidedly disturbed.

"Pull the blind down!" she suggested.

Beryl put up a hand and gave the blind a tug,

alas so hard that she pulled it down roller and all, and it descended with a crash upon Mary's head. Mary emitted a yell, which though stifled was loud enough to be heard two doors away. It roused Hester.

"What are those kids doing now?" she muttered, and jumped out of bed.

The appearance of their prefect in Dormitory 4 caused a spasm partly of apprehension and partly of relief. At any rate she was someone to whom they could appeal for protection from the occult. Several of them clung round her.

"We've seen a ghost!"

"It's Mistress Dorothy!"

"We said she haunted!"

"Oh, I'm so scared of ghosts!"

"Where did you see it? Here, in this room?" asked Hester.

"No, it's out in the garden!"

"Look for yourself!"

"Oh, don't let it come in, don't!"

Hester advanced to the window, put her head out cautiously, then drew it back with a chuckle.

"I'll soon clear this up. That's no ghost, it's only Miss Humphries!"

"Miss Humphries?" questioned amazed voices.

"Yes, it's her day off, and I know she was going to Leomford to a fancy dress dance. She sent home for a costume she had last winter. She showed it to me, a lovely one, Charles II period. She has a friend in Leomford who promised to fetch her in his car and bring her back. I expect she's saying a touching good-bye to him under the trees! And Miss Gerrard

134 Mystery of the Moated Grange

will be waiting up for her downstairs to let her in."

A chorus of "Oh's" came in response to this explanation, and bursts of laughter.

"So it was only Miss Humphries!"

"No ghost after all!"

"She's a long time saying good-bye and thank you!"

"Mr. Derrick's nose will be put out of joint now!"

"Just like Miss Humphries!"

"Hope she enjoyed herself."

"She would, you bet."

"I'd like to see her dress."

"Mistress Dorothy indeed!"

"Well, now you know it's a false alarm, what are all you youngsters doing skirmishing around this dorm at this time of night?" demanded Hester.

The members of No. 7 took the hint and vanished promptly to their own quarters. Hilda tried to carry off the situation.

"Oh, we just woke up, and were looking out at the lovely moonlight," she explained airily.

"And what's this?" asked Hester, eyeing the box that lay on one of the beds.

"Choc biscuits! *Do* have one. Take *two*!" said Audley persuasively, handing the box.

Hester after all was human. She had not tasted a chocolate biscuit since she left home. She simply could not resist the offer. As she munched the last delicious fragment she realized that it had been somewhat in the nature of a bribe. She tried to look the severe prefect instead of the undoubted sharer in a dormitory feast.

"I say, you know, you mustn't be having midnight

beanos! If Miss Gerrard had been in her room, instead of waiting downstairs to let in Miss Humphries, she'd have heard all this commotion."

"But you won't tell her, *please!*" implored several urgent voices.

"If you'll promise 'never again'!"

"On our honour!"

"What about the blind?" asked Mary, who was still tenderly feeling a bump on her head.

"My fault," explained Beryl quickly. "I pulled it down to shut out the ghost. I'll tell Miss Gerrard, in the morning, I did it to shut out the moonlight."

"The moon does wake us up sometimes," agreed Hilda.

"You young humbugs!" snorted Hester. "Well, into bed with you at once, before Miss Gerrard comes upstairs."

"Have another biscuit? There are three left!" offered Hilda generously.

"No thanks!"

When reviewing the situation calmly next morning Hester's conscience assailed her. She feared she had failed in her duty as prefect and that her authority over the juniors would be gone for evermore. Yet she could not break her promise and report them. She decided it was wise not even to tell her fellow-prefects of the incident. They would certainly consider her slack, she, who had always stood up for enforcing discipline. To her surprise, however, the juniors all behaved like lambs. Perhaps they felt that for once she had been one of themselves, and that she shared a secret with them.

136 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Those kids of yours really have reformed a little," commented Beatrice. "How did you do it?"

"Yes, I've noticed you manage them better now, somehow," agreed Irene.

"There's a nicer spirit among them," observed Lucy.

"Oh, they're not such a bad little lot after all!" replied Hester, evading the subject. "I suppose juniors *will* be juniors. We were young ourselves once!"

A sage remark, which, as Hester was not yet fifteen, made her friends giggle.

Perhaps the general slackness of attitude in the school had been noted at headquarters. At any rate one morning after prayers Miss Brookes made a stirring speech about the necessity of everyone doing her best, and that each of their several little duties was a part of the war job, to be performed conscientiously and well. They had been evacuated on the understanding that all should give help, and she hoped there would be no shirkers among them.

She further announced that they would now have an opportunity of giving real assistance to the nation. Mr. Lowman, the farmer, was about to cut his fields on the Abbey Farm. He was very short of workers, and she suggested that the school should be given a holiday and go and help to make hay. Hands up how many girls were prepared to volunteer?

Every hand in the school was at once raised and even shaken vehemently. The enthusiasm was complete. The prospect of some days in the hayfields, instead of brainwork, was alluring, especially as they

would feel they were giving their share towards winning the war. The weather was still very fine, the hay was ripe, and Mr. Lowman thankfully accepted their offer of assistance. It was a splendid crop, and for several days they all, including the teachers, spent many hours tossing the sweet-smelling hay. They watched with satisfaction when it was stacked. It would be worth something to the country, and *they* had helped.

Mr. Lowman in his turn gave them a thank-offering. He had a large patch of strawberries, which he did not consider would be worth the expense of picking and sending to market. He told the girls they might come and gather them and take them back for their tea. Eager squads at once arrived with baskets, and the school was regaled with a delicious feast. Everybody agreed that if hay-making and strawberry picking were a part of evacuation they were not sorry to be evacuees.

CHAPTER XI

Wet Days

The hay-making was no sooner over and the stacks safely covered with tarpaulins than the weather, which so far had been beautiful, suddenly changed. Great clouds blew in from the Welsh border, and it rained as it only can rain in a mountainous region. For days it simply poured incessantly. Maenan Grange, delightful in the sunshine, seemed a totally different

138 Mystery of the Moated Grange

place in the wet. The long passages looked dark and gloomy, there was a constant drip-drip-drip on the roof, the moat was overflowing into the sodden garden, and the stone floor of the hall was moist with damp. One day the girls even found a frog hopping up the big stairs, as if escaping from the deluge outside.

"This beats all! Just look here!" shouted Florence, who found the intruder.

"Well! We can hardly keep him as a pet!" commented Ethel.

"It's like the frog prince in the fairy tale!" laughed Lena.

"What are we to do with the beastie?"

"I'll fetch a duster, then you must catch him in it and put him out of doors."

"Right-o! Be quick about it. He's trying to hop away. No, I tell you I *won't* touch him with my bare hands. He looks so slimy. Ugh!"

The poultry, the care of which had been undertaken by the school, must not be neglected. A squad of girls, clad in mackintoshes, sallied forth and put food for them in one of the empty outhouses, where they could scratch about for it under cover.

"If this goes on we shall have to keep ducks instead!" said Moira. "I've always thought we might have some on the moat. Whew! Look at Speckley! She's been out in the rain. Her feathers are drenched."

Those fowls that had ventured forth were certainly very bedraggled and forlorn. Poultry keeping in bad weather had its drawbacks. The poultry squad, however, enjoyed the scramble in the torrents of rain, and cheerfully suggested to Miss Brookes that the school

might take a ramble to look at the river in flood. They could hear the roar of the water in the distance. To that project the Head would not agree. To dry the garments of sixty-four girls, who would probably get soaked to the skin in spite of mackintoshes, was an undertaking with which the kitchen fire could not possibly cope.

"No, no! You must wait till the rain stops. This isn't a school for mermaids! We must amuse ourselves indoors to-day."

Keep fit, dancing and games provided exercise, but the downpour continued steadily, and when on the third day it still rained, with no sign of stopping, the girls began to feel much disgruntled.

"The country's all very well in fine weather!"

"Give me the town!"

"I wish we could go to the cinema!"

"There's nothing to do here."

"Absolutely nothing."

"I don't like being evacuated!"

Classes, of course, were held as usual, but it was in their recreation time that matters slacked. They had been accustomed to spend so many hours out of doors. On this third afternoon, Miss Brookes, anxious to provide anything in the shape of a diversion, assembled them all in the big hall, and announced that she was going to give them a talk about life in the olden days, and how the lot of modern boys and girls differed from that of those who had lived many centuries ago.

"Um—rather like lessons, isn't it?"

"Pity she hasn't some lantern slides."

140 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Well, we haven't a lantern here."

"Smarty! As if I didn't know that."

"We haven't even the wireless."

"Miss Brookes has a portable, but something's gone wrong with it."

"It would! Just when it's too wet to take it into Leomford!"

"It's the back of beyond here, say I."

"Sh'sh, she's going to begin."

The head mistress indeed had her hand on the bell and rang it briskly for silence. The girls, some of them inclined to be interested, and others prepared to be bored, composed themselves obediently to listen. So she began.

"Education in our modern days is run on totally different lines from the ideas which were held many hundreds of years ago. Now we try to give young people as much freedom as possible and to teach them to use their own brains, but the mediæval method was to drive them along the paths of learning by means of great severity. Yet children were much the same then as now, and if we read some of the old records we find that human nature never altogether changes. To start at the very beginning of life, a mediæval writer giving advice to parents, states 'there cometh from the child thus born a wailing and a weeping that must about midnight make thee to waken'. His fifteenth-century suggestions would be scoffed at by modern nurses, for he says the baby must be swaddled, to keep its limbs straight, that is swathed round and round in bandages till it resembled a cocoon, with only its unfortunate little head sticking out. In ancient

manuscripts and pictures, you will always see the babies wrapt up like this, and on those gorgeous sculptured tombs in old churches, when the children of the deceased are represented kneeling behind him, there are generally two or three of these tiny mummy-like figures, probably of babies that died in infancy. The custom survived among peasants in Europe to our own day.

“Years ago I spent a short holiday in Venice, and in a back street there I saw a girl nursing a baby swaddled in identical fashion, except that its arms were left free. I was so interested that I begged her to let me hold it, the queer little creature felt as stiff as a board, and as it was probably unswathed only once a day its condition would fill a modern nurse with horror. I hope clinics have come to the rescue of Italian babies.

“In mediæval times this swaddling custom and also improper feeding probably caused the death of very many, for in records of families we often find that out of nineteen children only seven or eight survived, or sometimes even fewer still. Child welfare was not understood then. If the baby survived the rough treatment of its infancy it might look for much severity as it grew older. The rule of the rod was maintained for children. They were not supposed to sit down in the presence of their parents unless told they might do so, and before going to bed they had to kneel before their father and ask his forgiveness for any errors they had committed during the day.

“Lady Jane Grey declared that her parents expected her to do everything ‘even so perfetely as God

142 Mystery of the Moated Grange

made the world', and if she failed she was punished with 'pinches, nippes and bobbies'. No wonder she preferred to study Greek with her kind tutor who never scolded or threatened her. Agnes Paston, one of the writers of the famous Paston letters in the fifteenth century, used to beat her daughter once or twice a week as a matter of course, and when her son was sent to school she recommended the master that, if he did not do well, he must 'truly be-lash him till he do amend'.

"The boys naturally got the worst of it, as the girls were mostly educated at home, but even at a convent school the discipline was severe. We read that Saint Dulcibella of Paris whipped a little girl of seven years old black and blue, because she had the temerity to raise her eyes and look a masculine visitor in the face, instead of modestly gazing downwards as do all well-trained maidens.

"In some households perhaps kinder methods may have prevailed. In 1550 it is recorded that 'sugar confettes' were given to little Francis Willoughby 'to make him lerne his booke'. But blows, not bribes, were the more general rule. In a fifteenth-century poem a small boy is supposed to say:

'I would my master were an hare
And all his bookes houndes were,
And I myself a jolly hunter;
To blow my horn I would not spare:
For if he were dead I would not care.'

"In those days it was the fashion to send boys of gentle birth as pages into the households of great

nobles, where they would learn manners, as well as receive education from a tutor. Girls also would be sent as 'bower maidens' to the ladies of principal nobles, and would learn to read, to embroider tapestry, to play the lute and other accomplishments, which would correspond to a select boarding school of later date. It is only here and there that we find references to girls' education, but even in the time of Chaucer there were books of etiquette for the boys, written in Latin, French, and English, telling them the elements of correct behaviour as understood in those days.

"A boy must rise no later than six o'clock in the morning. He must comb his hair, wash his hands and face, see that his shoes are clean and his clothes properly put on, and must then say his prayers. If he is spoken to by a superior he must answer modestly but cheerfully, not hanging his head impishly, or scowling sullenly, he is not to puff, snort or scratch himself,

'Nor imitate with Socrates
To wipe thy snivelled nose
Upon thy cap, as he would do,
Nor yet upon thy clothes.'

"These are some of the directions given in one of the books of etiquette:

'Burnish no bones with your teeth,
For that is unseemly,
Rend not thy meat asunder
For that swerves from curtesy.
Dip not thy meat in the saltseller
But take it with thy knyfe.
And sup not lowde of thy pottage

144 Mystery of the Moated Grange

No tyme in all thy life.
Defyle not thy lips with eating much
As a pigge eating draffe.
Eate softly and drinke mannerly
Take heed thou dost not quaffe.
Scratche not thy head with thy fynghers
When thou arte at thy meate.
Peck not thy teeth with thy knyfe
Nor with thy fingers ende,
But take a stick or some cleane thing
Then do you not offend.'

"It certainly looks as if the home manners of the young people needed improvement when they went to learn culture in the houses of the nobles. In mediæval England boys of the merchants and tradesmen classes attended grammar schools in the towns, where they learnt Latin, which was then the universal language for all books and learning in Europe. Winchester School was founded in 1382 and Eton College in 1440. Originally they were to be for the benefit of poor scholars, but very soon their numbers were augmented by pupils whose parents could afford to pay fees. Among the famous Paston letters there is one preserved written by William Paston from Eton College on 7th November, 1478, to his elder brother John Paston. Allowing for the antique language and spelling it might be the epistle of a schoolboy of to-day. He wants some pocket money, he wants some new clothes, and he particularly wants a holiday to enjoy himself in London, pressing that point with much vigour.

"Latin was the foundation of all learning in medi-

æval times, and more advanced pupils studied logic and rhetoric: Arithmetic seemed to be regarded as very advanced indeed. It was not until the fourteenth century that Arabic numerals began to come into use, before that Roman numerals had to be used and must have been very cumbrous. St. Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherbourne and a great classical scholar in the eighth century, took up mathematics, and he wrote: 'The despair of doing sums oppressed my mind so that all the previous labour spent on learning seemed nothing. At last, by the help of God's grace, I grasped, after incessant study, that which lies at the base of reckoning—what they call fractions.'

"The good bishop would indeed have been amazed if he could have been told that more than a thousand years later every child in the kingdom would attend school and would master fractions as an indispensable part of elementary education.

"While boys had a hard time at school, learning Latin grammar and being constantly beaten for their mistakes, they nevertheless had some recreation. Though they had no organized games, as in modern schools, they played something resembling hockey, fives, tennis, rounders, and football. The walls of churches were often chosen as fives courts, and in consequence the windows were frequently broken, which made trouble and no doubt resulted in floggings.

"But what about the girls? Had they no sports too? The daughters of great nobles went hunting and hawking and no doubt the children of squires also rode on horseback. Boisterous outdoor games, such

146 Mystery of the Moated Grange

as played by the boys, would not have been considered suitable for them. We must remember that throughout the Middle Ages and indeed to the end of the eighteenth century or even later, all ladies wore dresses that reached to the ground, and little girls were attired as exact replicas of their mothers. So ancient pictures always portray them. Now try and imagine yourselves playing hockey in skirts that trailed round your ankles! It would be simply impossible. It must have been emancipation indeed when fashion allowed girls to wear frocks that permitted liberty of movement. Even in last century when calisthenics and gymnasiums were introduced for girls, gym costumes were considered a daring innovation at first.

“ But we may be sure that in spite of their cumbrous petticoats the girls amused themselves during the Middle Ages. We have records that they played indoor games. In the Bodleian Library there is a manuscript of 1344 with an illustration of them playing Blindman's Buff, which was then called ‘Hoodman Blind’, and in the same manuscript are two illustrations of girls playing ‘Hot Cockles’ and ‘Frog in the Middle’. Battledore and Shuttlecock was also played by children in the fourteenth century. The earliest form of tennis originated in France in the same period. Instead of using a racket the ball was struck with the palm of the hand, and the game was called Palm Play. There were evidently champions in those days, as there are in ours. A French writer tells of a damsel named Margot, who lived in Paris in 1424, and who played at hand tennis with the

palms and also with the back of her hand better than any man.

“ Singing games are also very ancient, so old that we can scarcely trace the origins of ‘ Here we come gathering nuts in May ’, ‘ London Bridge is broken down ’, ‘ Poor Jenny Sits A-weeping ’, or ‘ Silly old man he stands alone ’. ‘ Hunt the slipper ’ was certainly a favourite in the days of Goldsmith, for in *The Vicar of Wakefield* we have a spirited account of a party where the Primrose family join with Neighbour Flamborough and his children at Hot Cockles and Hunt the Slipper, and the fair Olivia, forgetting her efforts at gentility, is ‘ bawling in a voice that might deafen a ballad-singer ’.

“ For quiet games chess and draughts have been favourites from the earliest times, having come down from Egyptian and Babylonian days, and played by Saxons, Danes and Normans.

“ Then all through the Middle Ages the children, boys and girls alike, would be taken to see the great religious pageants, and later the masques and plays that were the beginnings of the theatre. Sometimes the children themselves took parts. Milton wrote *Comus* in 1634, as a Masque to be acted by the children of the Earl of Bridgewater at Ludlow Castle.

“ The village lads and lasses also had their special festivities. There was May day, when they danced round the Maypole and crowned their May Queen with much ceremony. Hallowe’en was a great occasion to be observed, and many country places had their own local celebrations, often in connexion with some saint, or even a survival of some pre-Christian custom.

148 Mystery of the Moated Grange

There was no lack of opportunities for enjoyment in those days, when England was called Merry England.

“ In the reign of Queen Elizabeth girls of the upper classes were highly educated by tutors in noble houses, but it was long before education was considered even desirable for their sisters of lower station. In 1764 Goldsmith wrote his delightful story *The Vicar of Wakefield*. He narrates that the vicar's wife, Mrs. Primrose, could ‘ read any book without much spelling ’, and we are given to understand that though Dr. Primrose instructed his boys in the elements of Latin grammar, the two lovely daughters, Olivia and Sophia, grew up with practically no education at all. Girls were not considered to require it in those days, cooking, sewing, and a little music and dancing was sufficient for them, their only ambition being to make a good marriage.

“ During the early part of the nineteenth century girls attended private schools in towns, and in the country were taught by their parents or by resident governesses, often with very indifferent qualifications. They learnt from ‘ question and answer ’ books, which consisted of a queer jumble of knowledge of all kinds. Some, at the age of perhaps fifteen, would be sent to ‘ finish ’ at select boarding schools, where accomplishments, such as music, drawing, dancing, French, and particularly polite manners were to be acquired.

“ It was not till 1870 that education became compulsory, and that every child in the kingdom, however poor, was obliged to learn to read, write and cipher. Up to that date the labouring classes had been largely

illiterate. Somewhere about 1880 High Schools for girls began to be established, and met with immediate success in all the big towns, their modern methods revolutionizing the old, and they soon eclipsed the small private schools, bringing in examinations, calisthenics, organized games, gymnasiums and the curriculum that now obtains everywhere. The former notion that education was wasted upon girls is happily exploded, and they have as good a chance in life as their brothers.

“It is interesting though to look back through the ages, to trace the development of the new ideas, and to realize how children lived in those former days. We get our knowledge of them thanks to the many old manuscripts which have been preserved in colleges, monasteries and private houses. We should have learnt little of the intimate life of the fifteenth century if the Paston family had not kept the collection of letters which their ancestors wrote to one another. A historian's work is to study such documents, and from them to re-create the past. An antiquarian's work is to translate old manuscripts written in Latin, often with many abbreviations, which are unearthed from ancient oak chests in country manors, from the vestries of churches, or that have been stored away in college libraries and have been forgotten till some new librarian turned them up. People should never burn old documents without carefully reading them first to ascertain whether they are of value. Who knows how much information may have been lost in this way?

“Well, I hope I have given you some picture of what girls were like in bygone times, and that you

150 Mystery of the Moated Grange

will congratulate yourselves that you live in the twentieth century, and are the 'heirs of the ages'. I must stop now, as I see it's nearly tea-time. Please remember tea is a modern institution, and that in the Middle Ages you would have been drinking home-brewed ales, and would have had no sugar and certainly no jam."

CHAPTER XII

A Discovery

At the tea-table the girls sat chuckling over the mediæval book of etiquette.

"Drink thy tea mannerly!" admonished Lena.

"And not as doth a pig!" sniggered Enid.

"As if I ever did!" retorted Muriel indignantly.

"Well, I'm not saying you do. I'm only quoting!"

"Chaucer's Prioress was held as an example.

'She wiped her over lippe so cleane
That in the cup no drop of grease was seene,'

remarked Florence.

The class had studied the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales, and had admired the Prioress and her good manners.

"I'm glad we each have a separate cup, and don't have to pass one round, it would be horrid to have to drink after other people."

"Or no salt-spoons, and dig your knife into the salt-cellar!"

"I'd certainly rather have tea than home-brewed ale."

"Pass the jam please, Marian!"

"Marian, don't you hear? Pass the jam!"

"She's dreaming!"

"Marian, wake up!"

Marian gave a start, and handed the jam dish as requested. Her thoughts had indeed been far away, further than she would have cared for any of her friends to know. She had not listened to their chatter, so absorbed was she with a sudden idea. Miss Brookes had mentioned that many important old documents had been found in remote country houses. What if any such remained in Maenan Grange? She remembered that when Mrs. Bevan left and the head mistress took possession of the warden's room, the contents of the big bureau had been bundled away and put into a chest in one of the attics. What were these papers? She was sure her mother had been much too busy to examine them. Possibly among them there might be something of interest. As her father and mother were both absent she was the only representative of the family at the Grange, for little Hilda could not be counted. It was plainly her privilege to go and examine these papers, nay positively her duty.

"I shan't say a word to Miss Brookes or to anybody," she ruminated. "The teachers try to make me feel I'm just one of the school here, but I'm far more than that. I'm the daughter of the owner, and all the rest of this crowd are nothing but evacuees. I must look after Dad's interests. If I found any valuable papers and showed them to Miss Brookes she might

152 Mystery of the Moated Grange

take possession of them and send them off to a museum. No, I must keep quiet about this."

Janie was nudging her and saying: "Marian, what's Hot Cockles?"

"Never tasted them!" she replied abstractedly.

The girls shook with suppressed laughter. It was not "manners" to crow with mirth at the tea-table.

"I mean the game, silly! Do wake up. How do you play it?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Ethel knows," was passed along the table. "She'll teach us."

"We're going to have all the old mediæval games before prep," announced Patty. "It's a great idea. I haven't played 'Poor Jenny sits a-weeping' since I was a small kiddie."

"And I've never played it at all."

"Oh, well, you'll soon learn. It's not like maths anyway!"

"Think of that poor old bishop getting floored over fractions! What a joke!"

"Well, if he only had Roman figures it must have been rather hard. I'm sorry for him."

"There was nobody to flog *him* if he couldn't do his sums!"

"I dare say he took it out of the boys to make up."

"Didn't little King Edward VI have a whipping-boy who was switched instead of him when he made mistakes in his lessons?"

"So I've read. A jolly shame too!"

When tea was finished and washed up, and the

tables moved and placed against the wall, the school gave themselves up to a rollicking time, playing the old-fashioned games such as had amused former generations. Her companions were so absorbed that they never noticed that Marian had slipped quietly away. She went up the big stairs, and then along a passage and up a narrow flight of stairs that led to the unused attics. It was a part of the house which was labelled "out of bounds", but she considered that as one of the Bevan family the Grange held no bounds for herself. The old garrets were under the roof, and she should hear the rain drip-drip-dripping with dismal persistency. It was very quiet and lonely and rather spooky up there all alone. She wished Arthur could have been with her. She walked along peeping into the empty rooms till she found the one which contained the big oak chest. She lifted the lid and turning over the papers began to look at them.

At first there was nothing interesting. They seemed mostly to consist of receipted bills. There were a few advertisements of sheep dip and manures and farm implements, and some private letters referring to tenants' affairs. Nothing in the least likely to prove of antiquarian value to future generations. She made a final scoop to the bottom of the chest and pulled out a handful, which she threw on the floor. One of these immediately attracted her attention. It was an envelope addressed to Tristram Bevan, Esq., Maenan Grange, and on it was written in another hand "Re old MS.". This looked more encouraging. She drew out the sheet of paper from the envelope, and took it over to the window to read it. It was headed Pen-

154 Mystery of the Moated Grange

dover Rectory, was dated twelve years previously, and ran as follows:

“DEAR BEVAN,

“I have carefully examined the old document you sent me and have done my poor best at translation, but it is written in indifferent monks' Latin with many abbreviations, and portions of it are so blurred and defaced I can make nothing of them. As far as I can gather it seems a record inscribed by one of the brethren of the Abbey cataloguing some of their treasures, and from a chance word here and there among the damaged part I should say it might tell where the said valuables were secreted before the advent of Henry VIII's commissioners. It was always suspected that the monks of Maenan Abbey hid their best treasures, and only left a portion as a sop for the greedy commissioners. I will, however, send the parchment to my friend Stafford, who is quite an expert with such MSS. He may be able to decipher the damaged and blurred parts which elude me. When I hear his report I will be sure to let you know.

“Sincerely yours,

“T. H. HOWELL.”

Here was indeed a discovery—or part of a discovery. That hidden treasure from the Abbey existed had long been suspected. This letter seemed to confirm it, though alas it did not locate it. Perhaps another letter from Mr. Howell had been received and explained more. Marian began feverishly to turn over

the remaining contents of the chest, but found nothing more.

And just then she heard the clang clang of the big gong summoning the school to preparation. It would not do to be late, and perhaps questioned as to where she had been. Taking the letter with her, she shut the chest, and hurried downstairs barely in time to slip into her place and open her books.

Marian's prep fared badly that evening. She could not concentrate on French verbs or English history. Her mind was full of nothing but the Abbey treasure. She must see Arthur again and tell him. In this pouring rain it was impossible to signal to him, but if it stopped she would hang out her red apron as an S.O.S., or she would defy rules and run up to the Abbey and find him. Did Uncle Tristram discover the treasure? Had Mr. Howell's friend been able to decipher the manuscript? Did Mrs. Griffiths and her husband get wind of it? These important questions entirely eclipsed her text-books, and she stared at the pages hardly seeing the print. When prep ended she had learnt practically nothing.

On the next day it still rained. Marian spent a distressful morning in class, much chided by Miss Humphries, who reminded her that if she had lived a few centuries earlier such shocking work would have been rewarded with the "nippes, bobbies and pinches" bestowed on the unlucky Lady Jane Grey. She might think herself fortunate to escape with only black marks in her report and not on her person.

In the afternoon, leaving the other girls to their various indoor recreations, she again escaped to the

156 Mystery of the Moated Grange

garret, and completely turning out the old chest, she carefully examined every paper it contained. There was nothing more however relating to the document. If Mr. Howell had written any further information Uncle Tristram must have locked his letter securely away. It was most tantalizing to be thus in possession of half the secret, and such a secret. She simply *must* go and tell Arthur. She knew he would be back from Leomford Grammar School about half-past four and that she might catch him before tea. She slipped on her mackintosh and rubber boots, and escaping among the squad who were going to feed the poultry, she dodged away from them round the cowsheds, climbed a fence and darted across the fields to the Abbey. Here she was in luck, for she met Arthur just as he was wheeling his dripping bicycle into the shed.

"Hello!" he exclaimed in amazement. "You here!"

"Oh, Artie, I've something to tell you, something most fearfully important. Where can we go to be alone. It's a tremendous secret."

Arthur whistled and deposited his bicycle.

"Not here. The other fellows will be bringing in their bikes. Come along to the barn. I say, this *is* wet weather! We get half drowned biking to school and back."

"And we're not allowed to go out, except to feed the hens. But I felt I *must* see you."

She was scurrying after him across the muddy yard. They went into the big barn, and in a quiet corner, where there was a little light through a lattice window she showed him the letter. He read it slowly through and whistled again.

"Well, this certainly is some news!" he commented.

"Yes, I can tell you I was excited. Do you think Uncle Tristram had another letter from this Mr. What's-his-name? Did he find out more?"

"You say you looked at every paper in the chest?"

"Oh, I did, most carefully. I had them all out on the floor. There wasn't anything else."

"No, there wouldn't be. If another letter came telling him where he might find things you may be sure he'd lock it up and not leave it lying about in the bureau. He might even destroy it, when he knew the secret, so that nobody else should know."

"Do you think he found the treasure?"

"It seems likely. People say he was nearly bankrupt, and then suddenly he seemed to get money somehow and paid off the mortgages on his farms. Where did he get it?"

"He might have borrowed it."

"No one would have lent it without a proper security. I know enough about business to tell you that."

"But if he found the treasure why did he keep it such a secret?"

"Don't you see? He wouldn't be sure if it was really his. It must have belonged to the Abbey originally. It might have been considered church property. It depends so much where he found it, whether in the ground, or inside a building, and whether on his own land. There are all sorts of queer laws about treasure trove. Sometimes it belongs to the King, and sometimes to the owner of the land. I expect if he really found it he'd say to himself. 'Well, finding's keeping.'

158 Mystery of the Moated Grange

If I blazon it abroad there may be a lawsuit about it, and the lawyers will get the most of it, or the King will claim it as treasure trove, and where shall *I* be? No, I'd best lie low and say nothing. Then he'd keep selling it, bit by bit, very likely in London. There are heaps of dealers who'd give a good price and not ask too many inconvenient questions."

"I wonder if he sold it all?"

"That's the point that appeals to us. Are there any things left? And if so where?"

"Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths know?"

"I shouldn't be surprised. They've probably had their pickings. I wouldn't trust either of them."

"Well, what's to be done about it? Shall we write and tell Dad and Mummie?"

Arthur frowned and stood for a minute considering.

"Better not," he decided. "They couldn't do anything, while they're away, and if they wrote to Miss Brookes the whole business would leak out, and some antiquarian society would step in, and if anything turned up it would be sent straight off to a museum. Then where would Dad come in, I ask you? No, mum's the word."

"Just what I think," nodded Marian.

"But we must poke about ourselves and try to find out. It would be splendid if we could discover it, and hand it over to Dad."

"Would it be Dad's?"

"He's the owner anyhow of the Grange, and the land."

"Ye-es," hesitated Marian, "but what about William? Suppose he turned up?"

"Oh, William! He's as dead as a door-nail! At least I hope so."

"But suppose——"

"I'm sick of supposing. What we've got to do is to keep a sharp look-out. Let me know directly if you find out anything more."

"I will, of course. Look here, I must scoot now, or I shall be late for tea, and Miss Laxon will ask where I've been. Ugh! It's still pouring with rain!"

"Yes; I shan't be sorry to get dry myself and have some tea. Off you go!"

Marian was lucky enough to return to the Grange unobserved. She left her wet mackintosh, cap, and rubber boots in the back hall, smoothed her hair and was just in time to take her place at the tea table.

"Where have you been?" asked Janie inquisitively. "You didn't help with the hens. I was looking for you."

"Oh, I was just poking round," murmured Marian non-committally. "You couldn't have looked far. Pass the bread and butter, please!"

CHAPTER XIII

Merry-go-round

When tea was finished Miss Brookes rang her bell for silence and made an announcement.

"The seniors have promised to give you all an entertainment to-night—a merry-go-round they call

160 Mystery of the Moated Grange

it. So that there shall be plenty of time for it we'll take preparation at once, and then you can have the rest of the evening free."

"What's this all about?" whispered Marian.

"Didn't you hear? Where were you before tea?" answered Janie. "The prefects were full of it, they've been getting ready for it all day, I believe. But only their form are going to give it. They wouldn't let us butt in, though Ethel and Patty asked them and said we might do some jolly stunts. They want to keep it all to themselves. We're to act audience."

"They would! Well, let them. We'll have a stunt of our own some day."

"We will! Anyhow we'll listen to theirs to-night. It may be quite amusing. Come along now. It's prep."

When the study hour was finished the lower seniors and the juniors took their seats in the hall, ready to play their part as audience. The Upper Seniors had indeed been busy making what scanty arrangements were possible, in a place where no costumes were available. They had begged a large sheet of black paper from the black-out cupboard, and some sheets of white shelf paper from the kitchen, and with these had contrived some masks and some white caps, in which a contingent sported as a Pierrot band, armed with combs covered with tissue paper, for instruments, and cans beaten with teaspoons for drums. They gave a jazz performance as an opening for the entertainment, rather noisy and occasionally out of tune, but quite effective as a beginning. Sea shanties followed, in which the audience were invited to join, so the choruses were roared with full vigour. Then came a

few solos, by Helen, Margaret and Vera, who had good voices and rendered popular songs, accompanied by Christine on the school piano.

After that Beatrice stood up and announced that there would be a recitation.

"It's called the 'Schoolgirls' Book of Etiquette', and we've composed it in imitation of the one Miss Brookes told us about that was written for boys in the time of Chaucer. We each did a bit of it, at least eight of us did, the rest said they couldn't make up poetry. Now, Moira!"

Moira stood up, shuffled uneasily, and said: "May I *read* it?"

"Yes, if you'd rather."

"Well, I'm sure I can't remember them unless I do."

"All right, go on!"

"Am I to say which of us made up which?"

"No, *no*!" yelled her companions.

"*Do* go on," urged Beatrice.

The audience clapped encouragingly, and shouted remarks.

"Don't be shy!"

"She's blushing!"

"We're waiting!"

"Here, *you* read it yourself," gasped Moira, pushing the paper into Beatrice's hand. "I really *can't*!"

So Beatrice cleared her throat and began:

"THE SCHOOLGIRLS' BOOK OF ETIQUETTE

When the loud gong begins to bellow

Don't hide your head within your pillow,

162 Mystery of the Moated Grange

But smile your best and don't look surly,
And say you like to get up early.

When put upon the wash-up rota
Please don't hang back and seem to loiter.
Don't smash the china in your haste,
There's not enough of it to waste.

Though essays make you groan and think
Don't smudge your fingers with the ink,
Because, you silly little duffer,
Your manicure will surely suffer.

When told to do some task or other
Don't pull a face and murmur "bother",
Although we know you are a dunce
Just keep it to yourself for once.

When you are worrying at maths
Don't wrinkle up your forrid.
It may assist to calculate
But makes you look just horrid.

If you would thrive you'll rise at five,
To thrive the more you'll rise at four,
More thriving be you'll rise at three,
But if you'd thrive the best of all
You'll never go to bed at all.

When going up your bed to make
Be sure the pillow gets a shake,
And don't forget the rule obey
And turn the mattress every day.

A girl who oft is prone to boast
Will find she is the scorn of most.

To praise yourself will never do,
We're down on every Tootle-too.

Full many a girl may oft endeavour
To show her wit and be so clever,
Although your sayings may be smart
Take care they do not leave a dart.

When in the country you are placed
And with wet days and boredom faced,
For goodness' sake don't look so sated,
Remember you're evacuated.

There's many a girl will try to shirk
And hide it with a cunning smirk,
But surely she should work the more
To knit for soldiers at the war.

So now we hope you will not quarrel
That we have pointed many a moral,
Nor will you find it passing strange
This etiquette of Maenan Grange.

The audience clapped, as was expected from them,
but Janie whispered to Alison, "Rather laid the moral
on with a trowel methinks!" and Alison replied, "I'd
like to give *our* version and have a shot at the prefects."

"*I* could make a lovely rhyme about the Perfect
Prefect," sniffed Patty:

"She never snaps you up or scoffs,
And on our faults she never drops!"

"Sh'sh! Sh'sh!" came from all sides, for Beatrice
was glaring in their direction.

164 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"If I may have silence," proclaimed the head prefect in slightly sarcastic tones, "you may perhaps care to listen to a continuation of the programme. As you know we've not been able to publish our usual school magazine, owing to evacuation, so we have compiled some items in manuscript, which we will read to you. They take the place of the general contributions submitted to the editor, and as the former editor of our school magazine is evacuated elsewhere, with the Sixth, we arranged for a committee of upper seniors to make the selection and arrange them as required."

"O-oh, they never asked *us* to contribute!" grunted Ethel.

"We knew nothing about it!" chimed in Lena.

"Kept it all to themselves!" murmured Enid.

Seeing disaffection in the faces of some of the audience, Beatrice hurriedly added an explanation.

"I'm sure you'll understand there was no time to ask for contributions from all over the school. It really had to be strictly limited to a few. But if you care to hear these efforts——"

Hearty clapping drowned any further remarks, and feeling that she carried the approval of most of the room with her, she proceeded:

"Well then, our first item is a story, entitled

A PHANTOM INTERVIEW

by our Special Reporter

Having learnt that certain phantoms, spirits, or, as they are vulgarly termed, ghosts, are in the habit of

returning to re-visit their former haunts at Maenan Grange, I determined, as special correspondent of this magazine, to seek an interview if possible with one or other of them and obtain their views as regards mediæval *versus* modern conditions. Having watched in vain on several occasions I was one moonlight night rewarded with a charming apparition in the upper corridor. The moon streamed through an unblacked-out window, and revealed a beautiful and youthful lady in a costume of the period of Charles II, tripping along towards me. There was a transparency about her appearance that emphasized her as astral rather than material, and I instantly grasped that she was at her old occupation of haunting.

"Good evening, madam," I greeted her. "May I presume that you are the renowned phantom of Dorothy Bevan?"

"*Mistress* Dorothy Bevan!" she replied haughtily.

"I beg pardon, *Mistress* Dorothy Bevan," I corrected, adding, "Pleased to meet you, I'm sure."

"She inclined her head with a condescending bow.

"May I ask for the favour of an interview?" I requested.

"If you wish," she conceded, more graciously than I could have expected, "so long as the conversation is limited to ourselves, and that you do not strive to exhibit me as a curiosity to the tribe of young females who are at present overcrowding the Grange."

"By no means," I replied. "I take it then that, as a former inmate, you disapprove of your ancient residence being used for the purpose of an evacuated school?"

166 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"I think it horrible," she shuddered. "In my day maidens were maidens and knew their place; the young females, whom I have lately observed here, to my mind more resemble males, their skirts are up to their knees instead of modestly round their ankles, they run, they shout and engage in boyish sports which would have deserved condemnation in all courtly circles where manners are cultivated."

"They certainly are allowed more liberty nowadays," I admitted. "But perhaps you may have visited our classrooms and noticed the great advancement in learning that has taken place, and the many varied subjects which they now study."

"Poof! Of what profit will book learning be to them in gaining husbands?" she scoffed. "In my day we studied graceful deportment and the elaborate figures of the dance, also the arts of the still-room and the uses of herbs. Your modern dances resemble those of peasants round a Maypole, and as for your banquets we should have been shamed to serve such to our fathers and brothers."

"You must remember this is war-time and we are strictly rationed," I objected.

"Even in the Puritan days men lived better and would have been ill content with your scant dishes."

"Then I may gather that you compare our present mode of living unfavourably with that of your former generation?"

"Obviously it bears no comparison."

The big clock on the stairs now began its chimes, and Mistress Dorothy Bevan, with a glance at the moon shining through the window, continued hurriedly:

"Excuse me, 'tis near midnight and I must be gone!"

"Just one moment, please!" I begged. "Can you tell me if Brother Ambrose still visits the Grange, and if I could obtain an interview with him? You might perhaps arrange a meeting for me, if you are in touch with him."

"Impossible!" she parried. "As a monk it would be breaking his vows to converse with females, and indeed I hear that this invasion of yours has much disquieted him. Like myself it is only occasionally he condescends to patrol his old haunts, for the sake of old memories."

"Yet if you could persuade him?" I entreated.

It was useless. The clock was striking midnight, and at each stroke the lady seemed to fade like a rainbow, till at the last she vanished quite away.

"Good-bye and many thanks!" I called.

I thought I heard a faint good-bye, almost like a breath of wind, but I could not be entirely sure. Our modern invasion of the ancient Grange had evidently been distasteful to her and she was entirely out of touch with our advanced ideas. I doubt if she will take the trouble to appear again.

The audience giggled as Beatrice laid down her paper.

"Who wrote it?" asked somebody. "Did you?"

"The authors desire to remain anonymous," replied Beatrice. "I'm only acting as a sort of B.B.C. announcer, and reading the mag aloud, as it can't be printed. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, do!" shouted several voices.

"Well, our next contribution is entitled

OTHER PEOPLE'S DOGS

I am sometimes asked if I like dogs. I think it is a stupid question. People don't ask "if I like grandfathers? or uncles? or cousins? Naturally one's own grandfathers or uncles or cousins are acceptable, but can I say I like them as a class, when they belong to other people? It is the same with dogs. I adore our own fox terrier, but other folks' dogs are an entirely different question. I certainly do *not* like that brute of a mongrel that waits round the corner to attack our darling Scamp, or the little wretch next door that wails at night when he's shut up in the garage. As for my Aunt Vera's peek Chin-Chin, he's an absolute pest. I go to stay sometimes with Aunt Vera and this is what happens. At lunch time he is shut out of the room and begins to yowl and scratch the paint off the door.

"No, Chin-Chin, you *can't* come in!" calls Aunt Vera.

"Yow-yow-yow!"

"Be quiet!"

"Yow-yow-yow!"

"Oh dear, he's scratching the paint! Do you mind opening the door?"

Up I jump and do so, and the little wretch bolts in, and sits up and begs.

"No, Chin-Chin! Your dinner is on your plate in the corner. Go and get it. Nothing for you here!"

He runs to the corner, takes a disdainful sniff at the soaked dog biscuit and returns to his post as beggar.

"Well, I'll put you just a scrap of gravy on it," concedes Aunt Vera, rising with the gravy boat. Chin-Chin licks up the gravy, leaves the biscuit and comes back to sit up and beg, waving his paws about and emitting sharp barks.

"What a nuisance you are! Be quiet!" says Aunt Vera.

"Yow-yow-yow," persists Chin-Chin.

"Well, just this little bit, no more," and Aunt Vera puts a scrap of meat into his mouth, which he promptly bolts and goes on begging and barking.

"Poor little fellow, it's his only enjoyment," says Aunt Vera indulgently.

He is supposed to sleep in a basket in her dressing-room, and is put to bed there, with a cover over him. But from the spare room I can hear what generally happens later on. Loud yowls and scratchings on the dressing-room door.

"Be quiet, Chin-Chin!" from Aunt Vera.

Louder yowls and more vigorous scratchings.

This goes on till I hear Aunt Vera open the door, groaning "Well, come in then!" and I know Chin-Chin is being lifted on to her bed and is snuggling on to her eiderdown.

Our Scamp is a well-brought up dog, he does not get bits at meals, and he sleeps in his own basket in the kitchen. He has learnt to shut the door, to shake hands and to carry a parcel.

Do I like dogs? There are dogs *and* dogs! I like

170 Mystery of the Moated Grange

our Scamp, but other people's dogs, that's a different question. I'd as soon like other folks' grandfathers.

Beatrice laid aside this contribution and glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Time for another," she said, taking up a third manuscript. "This is called:

AN IMPOSSIBLE STORY

Whether the following events, dear reader, are what you may deem as impossible, I can only narrate them as they were described to me one evening by a friend, whom I certainly consider a dreamer and sometimes apt to confuse her visions with realities.

I know not how the truth may be
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me.

"It happened many years ago," began my friend, "and it created rather a sensation at the time, though the matter since has faded into oblivion.

"At that period I was greatly interested in the occult and was making a study of Yogi methods. As you may perchance have heard one of the secrets of the Mahatmas is the art of levitation, that is to say the faculty of overcoming the force of gravity and being able to float in the air, as was practised on several occasions by the celebrated medium, Home. This had particularly attracted my attention, and having obtained possession of certain books by means of which I mastered the process of initiation for this triumph over one of the laws of nature, I continued my studies

in this respect till one fine day I made the discovery that I had achieved success. I was actually able to spring into the air, take several steps, and remain balanced as though the pull of gravity did not exist. By a little further practice I could even dance in mid-air, and descend slowly when I wished. It was indeed a most marvellous victory over nature.

“ Yet here my success and my final downfall began. At that time I was in very poor circumstances, my time having been spent in occult study had left me no leisure to earn my living, and I was indeed on the very verge of beggary. It struck me that this new accomplishment might surely be turned to a favourable account and help me out of my difficulties.

“ There was a large Hippodrome in the city, where music-hall performances were on show every night, and gymnasts and dancers headed the programme. Next morning therefore I hastened to the box office and requested to see the manager on important business. After some delay and rudeness from several minor officials I at last reached his sanctum and, opening the door, I entered without knocking. He glanced round from his desk uttering words, that I will not repeat, at this intrusion on his privacy. My reply was such as to cause his eyes nearly to drop out. I leapt into the air, and standing many feet above his head I gave a graceful curtsy, then pirouetted in a dainty little aerial dance, such as might have been executed by a sylph.

He stood watching me open-mouthed and goggle-eyed and when I at last descended and bowed he gasped out:

“ ‘ How the dickens did you do it?’ ”

172 Mystery of the Moated Grange

“ ‘That’s my secret,’ I replied, ‘but I am quite willing to give a performance in your hall, if terms prove satisfactory.’

“ ‘Sign an engagement at once!’ he shouted. ‘It will be the stunt of the century. Nothing ever like it.’

“ He reached for pen and paper and named a sum that I thought high, though I was clever enough to stand out firmly for one even higher. He knew if he did not secure me I should apply elsewhere. Well, financial terms were settled, and I was engaged to appear next week at the Hippodrome. The performance was extensively advertised and huge posters were displayed. The theatrical costumier arranged a charming costume for me, consisting of Turkish trousers, and a wide filmy skirt and velvet bolero. I was starred as ‘Zaza the Eastern Wonder’.

“ I need hardly tell you the Hippodrome was crammed each night to overflowing. My performance consisted of leaping from the stage into the body of the hall, tripping in the air round the boxes where I blew kisses to the audience, then still in mid-air giving a series of charming dances, for which I had been coached by the ballet master, finally flitting gently back to the stage, amid thunders of amazed applause.

“ Of course I was inundated with interviewers, mostly newspaper correspondents, though some were even men of science. They all wanted to know how I did it. That I refused to reveal, in spite of large offers of money for the secret. There were theories that I did not really appear in the air, that it was only a fake, a clever lantern illusion, but I was able to counter that

by actually shaking hands with occupants of the boxes as I passed them, and by scattering sweets among the audience, which no filmed illusion could possibly have done.

"Several weeks of triumph passed by, and I had reaped a little harvest of money, which I placed safely in the bank. I was canny enough to extort a fee even for having my photograph taken, so I was rapidly growing rich.

"Then one night, one fatal night, after an evening of immense success I had a vivid and terrible dream. A Mahatma appeared to me, his grave, dark face full of reproach and warning.

" 'You have broken the rules of the occult circle,' he chided. 'Do you not know that students of Yogi who utilize for their own financial gains the powers conferred on them by the Elder Brethren are betraying the higher circle, and are in fact practising Black Magic? Beware! This will lead you into terrible danger if continued, for thus the witches of old fell under the spell of the evil one. Powers over nature are only granted if used for the benefit of mankind, never to excite mere amazement, and never to gain riches or personal power.'

" 'As a rebuke and for your own safety I am withdrawing this gift from you, you are found unworthy to possess it, and henceforward you must devote your occult studies to another direction, for the power of levitation will not be restored to you during this present incarnation.'

"He disappeared and I awoke from my dream, but alas! when I tremblingly essayed to mount into the

174 Mystery of the Moated Grange

air I found the power had gone, and gravity again chained me to the ground.

"There was nothing for me to do but to sham illness, and break my engagement at the Hippodrome. I withdrew my money from the bank, and went abroad, where I lived quietly, under my own name, and telling no one I had once been the famous Zaza. My achievements had been a 'nine days' wonder' and were soon forgotten, most people declaring that after all it must have been a fake. In sad repentance I am trying to atone for my grievous error, and hope that the Elder Brethren of the Occult Circle will deem me worthy of further progress in a future incarnation."

Beatrice laid aside this contribution and glanced at her wrist-watch again.

"Time for just one more," she said, taking up another paper. "This is on a more serious subject, it's entitled

EDUCATION

Education is one of the great problems of our present century. It engages the attention of the directors of education, of teachers and university professors, who hold tremendous conferences to discuss the important questions that arise. The only people who are not consulted on the matter are the pupils themselves. They are never represented at these conferences and asked to give *their* views, they just have to accept the curriculum laid down for them and put up with it. Now if I were asked *my* opinion I could have a great deal to say. Why do we have to absorb such a vast

amount of indigestible knowledge, much of which we promptly forget afterwards? Why not learn a few landmarks thoroughly, which would stay in our heads like the multiplication tables?

What I mean is this, we spend a whole year, perhaps, studying the period of history of the Royalists and Cromwellians, we learn the dates of all the battles and many details which we write in exam papers and then consign to oblivion. Why not take periods of history with just a few outstanding dates to remember, what you might call skeletons of history? We could consign those to memory, and the teacher could describe all the rest to us in class, if she has any gift of narrative—some have by-the-by and some haven't. The same with geography. We could learn the landmarks, the principal features of the world, the various countries and their products, etc., but why in exams are we confronted with wretched catch questions such as locate Ancona, Altona, Almora, the Iron Gates, the Barrier Reef, which are only intended as traps to make us lose marks? Teachers say it is to sharpen our brains, but can't they be sharpened equally well with really useful information, I ask?

Next year I shall have to swot for the school cert. I am told that unless I pass it I can't qualify for any career afterwards. What a life! I really begin to think girls were better off in the olden days, when they weren't required to burden their heads with learning. There, I've aired my grievance, and if this could be passed on to the director of education it might show him the views of one of the pupils. I fear it wouldn't have much effect though. I can just see him shaking

176 Mystery of the Moated Grange

his head and saying, "Lazy young wretch that! Do her good to work!"

Beatrice looked again at her watch, when she had read this item, and announced:

"I'm afraid we've exceeded our time limit, and we must stop. Will you all stand up and sing God Save the King. I should like to explain that as broadcaster of the magazine I am *not* responsible for the views expressed by contributors."

Janie nudged Patty at this remark, and whispered: "I know why she put in that! Miss Brookes was hovering in the background, I saw her! Wonder what she thought of it?"

"Do her good to hear free opinions!" chuckled Patty.

CHAPTER XIV A Cycle Tour

That night there was a tremendous gale of wind that blew all the clouds away from the mountains, and next day the rain had ceased, and the sun was shining brightly. Flowers, beaten down by the storm, began to raise their heads again, birds were singing in the trees, and the whole atmosphere of the Grange took on a new and more cheerful appearance. The girls, kept in so long by bad weather, rejoiced to be once more able to go out of doors. Marian especially enjoyed the altered conditions. To the others the Grange was

merely a house of evacuation, but to her it was the family home, which she was growing to love. She thought regretfully of the happy month they had spent there before the advent of the school, how they had got up early in the morning to ramble round the garden and explore the fields, feeling the place was their own, and constantly finding fresh beauties, trees opening out, plants springing up, birds' nests in the bushes, and all in a territory which belonged to them. She knew the occupation of the school was inevitable, but it spoilt the sense of possession. She could not now get up early and roam about as she liked, the prefects would see to that, she must keep rules like the rest, and the girls were decidedly on the alert to resent any hints from her that her father owned the property.

Hilda, being younger, and of a more sociable disposition than her sister, had settled down entirely happily among the juniors, thoroughly enjoying the fun she had with her friends, and quite content for the school to occupy the Grange, indeed she thought the house would be very dull without them and hoped they would stay on. She was naturally adapted for life in a boarding school, while Marian preferred a quieter environment, and was essentially a home girl.

Now that weather had changed for the good and appeared settled the girls reminded Miss Brookes that she had not given them a half-term holiday. The hay-making had interfered with this, and though in itself a welcome interval, they did not consider it compensation for the usual break that had occurred at their former High School. A deputation of prefects waited

178 Mystery of the Moated Grange

on her in the warden's room, and begged her to consider this relaxation.

Perhaps she thought they deserved it, anyhow she was particularly amiable and promised to make some arrangements. The result was an announcement that those girls who possessed bicycles would be taken for a two-days' cycle tour by Miss Gerrard, starting on Monday morning, as they could be accommodated for the Monday night at a Youth Hostel, vacated after its week-end occupation, and returning on the Tuesday evening. The rest would go to the cinema at Leomford, half of them on Monday afternoon and the other half on Tuesday, escorted by herself, or one of the mistresses. Those who desired to go the cycle tour must give in their names at once, so that their quarters could be secured at the Youth Hostel.

The fourteen seniors who had brought their machines to the Grange entered for the tour, as did Marian, but Hilda, though she also possessed a bicycle, decided it would be greater fun to accompany her chums to the cinema than to take a ride with her elders, whatever the attractions in respect of scenery.

On the Saturday there was a tremendous overhauling and oiling of the bicycles, which had been lately neglected. Miss Gerrard herself inspected all their brakes to ensure they were in good order, as some of the country would be hilly and it was wise to take no risks. On the Monday morning therefore they started off, Beatrice, Moira, Anne, Irene, Flora, Eileen and Hester from the Upper Seniors, and Florence, Nora, Patty, Janie, Alison, Freda, Ethel, and Marian from the Lower Seniors, a jolly party of fifteen girls

with Miss Gerrard as leader. The day was perfect, and each took a packet of sandwiches and her night gear in her cycle basket.

Their tour was to be down the valley of the Wye, so they first cycled to Leomford, where they caught a train to Ross. Here they stopped, took their machines from the luggage van, and mounting them commenced the real part of their expedition, to follow the meanderings of the River Wye. It was a lovely road, with most beautiful scenery on either side. Wild roses and honeysuckle were not yet over. Ardent botanists spied occasional rare flowers and dismounted to gather them, calling out "Halt!" to the rest, for Miss Gerrard had stipulated that no one must lag behind and get lost. Cuckoos were calling, and bird enthusiasts recorded having seen woodpeckers, nuthatches and bullfinches. At one point near the river there was a heronry, with three huge nests in the trees, and nearby a heron was solemnly fishing in the water. It was hard to get the girls along, they wanted so often to stop to look at various things on the way. They ate their sandwiches at a roadside café where they were supplied with cups of tea.

"I'm glad you brought your own provisions," said the proprietress. "I couldn't have catered for such a large party on a Monday. What with rationing it's most difficult to run a business in war-time. I can give you tea, but the baker hasn't called yet, and I have only a little milk. Saturdays and Sundays clear me out, and I rarely get anyone on a Monday. People don't go joy-rides then."

"That's partly why we came to-day," explained

180 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Miss Gerrard. "I thought the roads would be quieter. And also we can be put up for the night at a Youth Hostel, which would be crowded at a week-end."

"You're right there. There are always plenty of hikers using those on Saturdays and Sundays. I don't give accommodation myself, only teas. I haven't room. I suppose you're an evacuated school?"

"We are: taking a belated half-term holiday."

"Well, I hope you'll enjoy yourselves. They look a nice set of girls I must say. Going on to Tintern, I suppose? If you want a good substantial meal go to the café near the boathouse. I can recommend it. I'm afraid they won't give you much at the Youth Hostel when you get there. My advice is have a high tea first."

"Yes, that's a good idea. The girls are sure to be hungry."

"No doubt they have fine appetites. I shouldn't care to have to cater for them every day. Sixty-four at the school, do you say? That needs some work."

Mounting again, they passed through Symonds Yat, where the river wound between cliffs which formed a magnificent amphitheatre, towering above woods like the battlements of an immense castle. The blue sky reflected in the water gave an almost foreign aspect to the scene, which was very impressive. It was hot here, and the road was steep, so they wheeled their bicycles, with frequent halts to admire the prospect.

Presently they reached Monmouth, a quaint old town famous in mediæval times, and celebrated as the birthplace of Geoffrey of Monmouth the chronicler of the twelfth century. They bought picture postcards

of the Monnow Gate, an ancient building on the bridge over the river, one of the principal attractions of the place, but there was not time to see much more if they were to get on to Tintern, which was still some miles away, and was one of the objects of their pilgrimage.

They arrived there at tea-time, and taking the advice of the proprietress of the roadside café they decided to have a good meal before going over the abbey. They found the place she had recommended, and were regaled with ham and eggs, hot scones, honey, and cakes, a most unwonted feast for war-time, and much appreciated as they were extremely hungry.

"I'm glad Miss Gerrard is sensible. I couldn't have enjoyed sightseeing after that long ride without I'd had some tea first," yawned Alison, leaning back comfortably on a bench. "I must say I'm tired."

"You're out of practice with biking, and so am I," agreed Florence.

"We shall be all right after a rest," said Patty.

"And a good tea!" put in Marian.

"Yes, Miss Gerrard is sensible about that."

"Perhaps she wanted some herself!"

"No doubt she did."

"I went an excursion once with Miss Brookes, and she worked us so hard looking at churches and things I was nearly dead before at last we got some tea."

"Yes, Miss Brookes can be *too* enthusiastic over sight-seeing."

Two upper seniors sitting near were also talking.

"It's the river that intrigues me," said Flora.

"Yes, I wish we could have come by the river

182 Mystery of the Moated Grange

instead of biking," agreed Eileen. "I love boating above everything."

"So do I."

"Can you row?"

"Rather!"

"I learnt to row last year in the hols, when we were staying at Windermere."

"Dad taught me in Cornwall. We used to go out fishing every day."

"I'd far rather go on the river here than look round ruins!"

"So would I!"

"I'm not too keen on old Abbeys."

"Same here!"

"Well, I say, why shouldn't we——" Eileen lowered her voice to a whisper, and the conversation which before had reached her nearest neighbours now became inaudible.

The view of Tintern Abbey among richly wooded hills on the banks of the Wye is one of the most celebrated of beauty spots. The picturesque old ruin seemed looking its best in the afternoon sunlight, and though Miss Gerrard assured them that sunset was *the* special time to see it, it had quite enough romance about it to satisfy the artistic imagination. The monks, when they founded the abbey in the twelfth century, had justified the assertion that religious houses always chose the pick of the scenery for their establishments. Whether this was out of real appreciation for the beauty of nature is doubtful, and probably the choice depended upon a gift of land and the vicinity of a good water supply, where fish for Fridays might be

obtainable. All throughout the Middle Ages the abbey had a reputation for sumptuous living and unbounded hospitality, great nobles visited it, and it was at one time a refuge for Edward II.

In its palmy days it must have overshadowed the neighbourhood, and its abbot must have been among the great ecclesiastical dignitaries of the time, playing his part in politics as well as in church matters. All this power, wealth and splendour came to an end at the confiscation of the monastery by Henry VIII, and now only the ruins remain to bear tribute to the glory of those past days.

After admiring the view of the abbey from a distance, and feeling refreshed with tea, the party were marshalled by Miss Gerrard to have a closer inspection of the ruin. They paid their entrance money, stacked their bicycles inside the barrier, and started off, accompanied by a guide, who explained the various points to be noticed in the architecture and discoursed at some length, waxing indeed rather more prosy than many of the girls altogether appreciated. It was when they were in the remains of the refectory, and pretending to listen to the guide's oration that Eileen and Flora were missed.

It was suddenly realized that no one had seen them since they had passed the entrance gate. The word was whispered round, and Miss Gerrard, interrupting the guide's eloquence, glanced at her flock, mentally counting them, and inquired "Where are Eileen and Flora?" Nobody knew, and a search of the ruins had no result. Finally Marian ventured hesitatingly to remark:

"I did hear them say something about going on the river."

"Going on the river!" repeated Miss Gerrard. "Have they actually left the party and run away by themselves? I must see to this at once. You all stay here till I return. Beatrice and Anne, you can come with me."

Leaving her girls in the safety of the Abbey, Miss Gerrard hurried away to seek the two lost sheep of the flock. She went to the boathouse near the café, and by inquiry found that two young ladies had certainly hired a boat and boatman about half an hour ago, and had gone up the river. No doubt they would be returning soon. There was nothing for it but to sit down and wait, though fuming with impatience and indignation.

"When did you last see them?" she asked the two prefects. Neither Beatrice nor Anne could remember.

"They must have sneaked off soon after we got through the entrance," declared Anne.

"They weren't with us in the cloisters I don't think," said Beatrice, trying to recollect.

"It's unpardonable of them, naughty girls! They don't deserve to be taken on a tour," fretted the distressed mistress. "They knew the party had to keep together. How can I possibly be responsible for you if some of you run away?"

After what seemed a very long time, but was probably not more than a quarter of an hour, a boat was observed leisurely coming from up-stream, rowed by an ancient mariner, and containing the missing pair, who looked extremely guilty when they landed at the

little jetty and were received by their frowning teacher.

"How dare you?" she chided. "You knew the rule of the expedition was to keep together. I shall report you to Miss Brookes when we get back. For the rest of our tour you must each be under the immediate supervision of a prefect. Anne, I shall hold you responsible for Flora, and Beatrice, you must look after Eileen. Evidently you're not fit to be trusted. I thought better of you both! Come along now, all of you. We've left the others in the abbey. Have you paid the boatman? Oh, he asked for the money beforehand, did he? Very wise of him."

Collecting her girls at the ruins, Miss Gerrard ordered them to mount their bicycles, and led the way along a country road where eventually they reached the Youth Hostel, where they had engaged accommodation for the night. It was more comfortable than they had expected, and the caretaker had provided quite a reasonable supper considering war-time catering. They sat out in the garden afterwards and watched the sunset. Flora and Eileen, though in dire disgrace at headquarters, were regarded with interest by some of the party, and retailed their adventure to a select few.

"Yes, we bolted just after we got into the ruins, when the guide was beginning to talk, and we scooted off to the boathouse, and found an old boatman who was hanging about the quay."

"He said he'd take us a row up the river and back for one and sixpence each."

"And he made us pay him beforehand, canny old thing!"

186 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"In case we got drowned, I suppose, and he didn't get the money!"

"Or in case we hadn't it. He meant to make sure of it anyway."

"Oh, it was gorgeous on the river."

"He let us both row."

"And Eileen nearly dropped an oar!"

"Well *you* tipped over, Flora, so don't talk!"

"Miss Gerrard won't forgive us. She's fearfully worked up about it."

"I don't care, it was worth it!"

"Except that we're in custody for the rest of the tour, sort of jail-birds—Anne has to keep an eye on Eileen, and Beatrice has me in tow, in case we might run away again. Not that we're thinking of it in the least."

"It's like shutting the stable door when the horse is stolen, in my opinion."

"By the by who gave us away and told we'd gone to the river? Marian! You say she overheard us talking? Little sneak! We thought we should just have time to do the trip and scuttle back to the abbey before we were missed. We knew that old guide would go on talking for ever."

Next morning after a fairly ample breakfast at the Youth Hostel they started again on their bicycles in the direction of Chepstow. They stopped at Moss Cottage, a fanciful little erection thatched and lined with moss, where they left their machines, and then ascended by a steep climb of 800 feet to the summit of the Windcliff, a great precipice from which there was the most magnificent view over parts of nine

counties, Monmouth, Gloucester, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Glamorgan, Brecon, Hereford and Worcester. They could trace the windings of the Wye, and its confluence with the Severn, see the mouth of the Avon, and far away the Black Mountains, a very wonderful panorama. They had to take the nine counties on trust, for they were not marked in different colours as on a map, but it was satisfactory to know that they had actually had a glimpse of them all from the same spot. Perhaps in ancient British times scouts had watched there to give warning of the approach of enemies: it must have been a splendid vantage ground.

They scrambled back down the path to Moss Cottage, resumed their bicycles and rode on to Chepstow. The chief attraction there was the castle, a magnificent pile, partly ruined, towering upon the summit of a cliff above the river. It still showed the remains of a great stronghold, with towers and dungeons and spiral staircases. In one of the towers Henry Marten, one of the judges who condemned Charles I to death, was confined for twenty years. He died there, and was buried in Chepstow Church, first in the chancel, but afterwards his body was removed to another portion of the church because the vicar would not allow the remains of a regicide to lie so near to the altar.

During the great Civil War the castle suffered many reverses of fortune, it first held out for the King, then was taken by the Parliamentarians, and finally was again captured by the royalists. Now its ruined splendour stood out above the river, a token of the glory that had departed, and a witness to the

188 Mystery of the Moated Grange

strong building of the days before gunpowder was invented.

Chepstow was the limit of their tour, so after a meal at a café they turned north, for they had to catch a train at Ross to get back to Leomford. They made a detour of a few miles to see Raglan, another very famous castle, if anything even more picturesque than Chepstow. Charles I found refuge there after the battle of Naseby. Raglan was besieged by Sir Thomas Fairfax for eleven weeks, and at last surrendered, being the last fortress which held out for royalty. The aged marquis was sent a prisoner to London, and the castle, being dismantled by order of the Parliament, fell a prey to his own tenants, who stole everything they could lay hands on.

"That's the way so many treasures were lost," commented Miss Gerrard, when they had digested this information given by the guide. "Soldiers would no doubt loot the castle first, then the people of the neighbourhood would come in and take what was left."

"Was it the same with the abbeys?" inquired Marian, who had private reasons for asking.

"No doubt it was much the same. Henry VIII's assessors would take all the valuables, but there must have been many things left in the abbeys, blankets, furniture, pots and pans, books, crockery and oddments that found their way into the farmhouses of the district. You can't blame the people for helping themselves after the place was left a ruin."

"Perhaps the monks sometimes hid their treasures?"

"It's on record that they did. You know the

nursery rhyme of Jack Horner? Well, that's a memory of an incident that happened at Glastonbury Abbey, when a man named Jack Horner concealed the documents of the abbey in a huge pie, as the best means of hiding them. No doubt the monks had secret places, and some old treasures escaped the great pillage. They may remain buried even to this day."

From Raglan they went on to Monmouth, and retraced their way back to Ross, where they had a belated tea at a café, and were in time for the train to Leomford. They reached Maenan Grange considerably tired, but much thrilled with all their experiences.

"It's something to write home about at any rate!" declared Patty.

"Yes, the others are saying we ought to have seen the film, but I'd rather have had our excursion," said Janie.

"It's more my idea of a half-term holiday," agreed Freda.

"What about Flora and Eileen?" asked Nora. "Have they got into a jolly row with Miss Brookes over that affair on the river?"

"No," said Florence, "Anne told me that she and Beatrice begged them off, and implored Miss Gerrard not to mention it. They said it would just spoil the holiday. She hummed and ha'd a little and talked about discipline and then she agreed to say nothing."

"Bless her!" murmured Patty.

"Yes, she's a sport."

"Flora and Eileen bought a lovely photo of Chepstow Castle in a frame, to give her if she turned up

trumps and didn't report them. So now they're going to present it to her as a peace-offering."

"Or a bribe?"

"No, not a bribe, because they're giving it to her afterwards, don't you see? A bribe would have been beforehand."

"Well, whichever way you take it it's compensation for benefits received."

"Hope she'll like it anyhow."

CHAPTER XV

A Strange Find

Though Maenan Grange was situated in the depths of the country, air-raid precautions were considered as necessary as in a town. The black-out was carefully preserved at night, and while the window curtains were drawn aside in the dormitories after the girls were in bed, in order to give them plenty of fresh air, they were strictly told never to show a light until dawn. As a rule everybody slept so soundly there was no need for this warning, nobody wanted to get up and strike a match and light a candle. Air wardens, however, kept watch in the neighbourhood, as farmers were sometimes careless, and men visiting the stables at night would swing lanterns in the fold-yards, which might focus the attention of a passing enemy plane, and cause a bomb to be dropped. It was thus that such accidents happened in country places.

One morning Miss Brookes received a call from the local air warden complaining that a light had been observed on several nights from some window on the east side of the Grange, and he wished to call her attention to it. Miss Brookes was astonished and distressed. She questioned him as to the exact position where the light was noticed and, taking him round the house, tried to locate at which window it could possibly have been. He was quite firm in adhering to the point that it was evidently a narrow window on the east side. What mystified them both was that they could find no such window. The only windows facing east were those of the kitchen, which was provided with shutters closed each night, and of Miss Stafford's and Miss Thompson's rooms above the kitchen, and they, when questioned, utterly denied having awakened from going to bed till rising when the alarm-clock sounded.

The air warden still persisted that he had seen the gleam himself and could not be mistaken, but as he could find no window to correspond with the spot he said he had observed he could do no more than depart with a warning to Miss Brookes to tell her pupils and teachers to be extra careful, and to impress upon them the need for such extreme precautions. Before leaving he looked at the outside of the east end, but could see no windows beyond those already scheduled, the rest of the wall, built on the remains of the old tower, being thickly covered with masses of ivy.

Miss Brookes assembled the school and gave the air warden's warning, and she also told Mrs. Griffiths and begged her to pass the message on to her husband,

in case they were careless at the lodge. Mrs. Griffiths received the information with her usual grim expression and answered that no one could accuse *them* of showing lights, for they went to bed before black-out, now the days were so long, and they got up at dawn and never struck a match till she kindled the fire.

"Of course I'm not accusing you," urged Miss Brookes, trying to be tactful with the old caretaker, who was one of the trials of her life at the Grange, "I'm only telling you what the air warden said."

"Well, there was no trouble before the school came here. I'll warrant it was some of your girls playing about in their dormitories. They're up to their tricks," retorted Mrs. Griffiths gruffly. "Those wardens are busybodies, poking about at nights. Best take no more notice of 'em."

Miss Brookes sighed and turned away. By the terms of her agreement she was obliged to keep on the old gardener and his wife, who were regarded still as caretakers of the Grange by the lawyers who administered the trust, and supposed to see that the school did no damage to the property. In this capacity they sometimes made themselves very disagreeable, and she heartily wished she could get rid of the dour and unpleasant pair. The education authorities, however, had rented the house on the stipulation that they remained in partial charge, so she must suffer their unwelcome presence, and counter their rudeness with courtesy.

On that very afternoon Marian happened to go into one of the empty stables, where she had hidden her garden trowel, because it was her own, and was

apt to be requisitioned by other girls if left in the tool shed. She had put it in one of the stalls, and she was there, taking it from a corner, when she heard voices. Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths had entered and were standing just inside the door. Though they spoke very low she could overhear what they were saying.

"You'll have to be more careful!"

"I tell you I was!"

"Don't be a fool!"

"Fool yourself!"

"Best wait a bit longer!"

"No use waiting!"

"Well, don't get caught!"

"Not me!"

"The old dodge again?"

"Yes, it pays."

Marian, as still as a mouse behind the shelter of the stall, listened with all her ears. She longed to hear more, but the pair moved away from the door and crossed the yard. What were they talking about? She did not trust them. They were evidently intent on doing something which they wished to conceal. Could it have any connexion with the light that the air warden had noticed at night? What was the dodge that paid? And why were they calling one another fools? It was all very mysterious and somehow sinister. She longed to tell Arthur about it, but she knew that on this afternoon he would be taking part in a cricket match at Leomford, and was to have tea with a Grammar School friend and would not return to the Abbey till evening.

"They're a pair of 'dark horses'. There's some-

194 Mystery of the Moated Grange

thing going on if I could only get to the bottom of it," she mused.

On that night Miss Humphries, who had been feeling touches of neuralgia all day, could not sleep. A tooth began to ache with much violence and she lay awake in the throes of great pain. People may make light of toothache, but if not a fatal or even dangerous malady, it is an extremely anguishing affliction. Miss Humphries nursed her throbbing cheek and regretted that she had no remedies in her bedroom, not even an aspirin tablet. At last the agony was so intolerable that she resolved to get up and go to the kitchen, where she might find some water still hot in the kettle to bathe her cheek, or some pepper to make a pepper plaster, anything to still the pain. Mindful of the black-out regulations she drew the curtains across the window, lighted a candle, and put on her dressing-gown. Then she opened her bedroom door and was about to sally forth into the passage when she saw *something*. Miss Humphries was not strong-minded like Miss Laxon or Miss Brookes; what she saw caused her to emit a series of piercing yells.

"Oh-oh-oh-oh!" she shrieked.

Doors were at once opened and girls, rudely awakened by her hysterics, crowded into the passage.

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Gerrard, who came bustling up. "What's all this about?"

"I saw something! O-oh!"

"What did you see?"

"It must have been Brother Ambrose!"

"A ghost?" shuddered the girls standing near.

"Nonsense!" snapped Miss Gerrard.

"I tell you I *did*! A figure all in black, like a monk with a hood over his head, glided along the corridor and disappeared round that corner. I saw it as plain as I see you."

"You were dreaming!"

"I was *not*. I was wide awake with toothache."

"What were you doing in the passage?"

"I was going down to the kitchen to get some hot water to bathe my face, and as I opened the door I saw—*it*!" And Miss Humphries shivered again.

The girls were whispering to one another.

"She certainly saw something."

"It must have been the ghost."

"Brother Ambrose?"

"They say he walks!"

"Oh, it *is* spooky!"

"Don't wonder she was scared."

"Don't like it myself."

"Will it come back?"

"The house *is* haunted!"

Mona, a little braver than the rest, produced a torch and flashed it down the landing.

"Hello!" she exclaimed. "What's this?"

And walking along she picked up something that lay shining upon the floor. It was a small crucifix of silver. She handed it to Miss Gerrard, who gazed at it in amazement.

"Ghosts certainly don't drop crucifixes!" she asserted.

"It may have been there before," quavered Miss Humphries.

"It certainly was *not* or some of us would have

196 Mystery of the Moated Grange

noticed it. We'll inquire into this to-morrow. Go to bed now, girls! Quick, vanish! There are no such things as ghosts. Do you still want to go to the kitchen, Miss Humphries?"

"No, no thanks!" replied the younger teacher, with a nervous glance down the passage.

"I'll go with you if you like."

"No, really not. If you could lend me an aspirin I'd be grateful."

"Yes, I have some in my room. I'll get the bottle. Sorry you have such a bad toothache. It's a wretched pain. Perhaps you'll be able to go to sleep."

"It's rather better now."

"Sometimes a sudden shock stops it."

"I certainly had *that*! Queer, finding that crucifix!"

"Yes, we must investigate to-morrow."

When told about the matter next day Miss Brookes was astonished and concerned. It appeared to her that somebody had been playing a trick and shamming ghost. By careful questions she found, however, that no girl had been missing from any dormitory, and that nobody could give the slightest information. In honour bound they assured her they were not responsible and she believed them. The crucifix was placed on view in the hall, yet no one claimed its ownership or professed to have seen it before. The whole affair seemed a mystery.

The only girl with any suspicions was Marian, and she did not care to make them known. Had Mrs. Griffiths come stealthily in the night, let herself in with her latchkey, and disguised as the reputed ghost

of Brother Ambrose, passed along the corridor? Was this the "old dodge" she had referred to? And where did that crucifix come from? Did she know where the Abbey treasure was hidden and was this a part of what she had stolen and inadvertently dropped? To tell Miss Brookes might be to put the Griffiths on their guard. It was better to keep a watch on them if possible, and by so doing to discover the hiding-place. They would be sure to deny any knowledge of it if questioned by the head mistress. In this surmise she was correct. Miss Brookes showed the crucifix to Mrs. Griffiths, who regarded it with an impassive face.

"It was found in the corridor," explained the mistress.

"Indeed! Some trinket, I suppose, one of the young ladies dropped!"

"It's a crucifix and a very ancient one, I should say by the look of it."

"Oh! I've never seen one before. Me and my husband go to chapel, and we don't hold with such things there. Popish, we call them."

"It doesn't belong to any of the young ladies. We can't imagine where it came from. Have you any idea how it could have been dropped in the corridor?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say. Some of the young ladies are careless enough for anything." And with a sniff Mrs. Griffiths turned away, looking superior and offended.

That same afternoon Marian washed her red apron, though it was not in the least need of such attention, and hung it out to dry on the garden fence. Evidently Arthur saw and recognized her S.O.S. When she

198 Mystery of the Moated Grange

strolled unobtrusively to Sir Hugh's avenue behind the cowsheds she found him waiting in one of the doorways. In the shelter of a stall, after first looking carefully round to make sure they were alone, she poured out her whole story.

"Whew! Looks fishy to say the least of it!" pronounced Arthur. "I say, I believe we're on the right track. That Griffiths couple know something, or I'm a Dutchman. That old witch has been scrooging about the house at night, shamming ghost to scare anybody who saw her. How did she get in? I thought they slept at the lodge."

"So they do, but she has a latchkey and lets herself in early in the morning to light the kitchen fire."

"Then she could just as easily sneak in at midnight if she wanted."

"That's so. No one would be awake."

"Looks to me as if they knew the whereabouts of some secret hiding-place and that she comes to purloin things. That crucifix is evidence enough. No doubt she dropped it, though she'd swear on her Bible oath she'd never seen it before. Old Amos must be cursing her for her carelessness. Takes a stick to her perhaps!"

"She'd stand up to him if he did. She's a tartar and no mistake about it."

"Well, what's to happen now?"

"I don't know."

"Seems to me the only thing is for you to keep a watch on her."

"Yes, but how exactly can I?" frowned Marian, "I can't keep awake all night and keep popping out of my bed to peep along the landing."

"Well, no, but you might possibly hear footsteps, and then you could jump up."

"She probably wears goloshes and treads as softly as a cat."

"Likely enough. Still I'm only offering a suggestion. That business of the light was funny. I wonder if there's a secret room in the old tower end, with a window covered up by the ivy? I remember reading that in Glamis Castle there's a window no one can account for, and there's supposed to be a secret room there. If I wake up in the night I shall look out and if I see a light I'll hurry down to the Grange and bang you all up. Perhaps we just might catch her at it."

"She'd hear you banging and be gone before anyone could see her."

"It's worth trying anyway, and I'll do it, if I wake up."

"Yes—if! You're a sound sleeper!" sniffed Marian, who thought Arthur's plans were not worth much. "Well, if that's all you can suggest I must be going. Those prefects are always on the alert, and I shall be asked what I've been doing with myself. So ta-ta!"

Arthur was more resourceful, however, than she had imagined. A new idea occurred to him afterwards and he determined to put it into practice. If there really were a window of a secret room among the ivy of the old tower it might be possible to locate it, if he could climb up. He woke very early next morning, in spite of Marian's accusation of sound sleeping, dressed, and left the abbey before even the labourers were about. He came down to the Grange, hoping to find

200 Mystery of the Moated Grange

the ladder somewhere, but though he searched it was nowhere to be seen. Old Amos must have taken the only one they possessed and hidden it away. There was nothing for it but to venture a climb. The stems of the ivy were thick and twisted and he scrambled up for some distance without much difficulty. He was perhaps half-way up the wall when to his consternation he heard a shout from below. Holding on tight he turned his head and saw Amos standing on the grass. Early as his visit was the old gardener had risen equally betimes.

"Hello! What are you doing there?" yelled Amos.

"Hunting for bird nests!" parried Arthur.

"You won't find none! Come along down!"

"I believe there's a jackdaw's here!"

"I tell you there ain't! You come down!"

As it would be inadvisable to continue a search for a secret window under the keen eyes watching him from below, Arthur reluctantly scrambled down again.

"I won't have you boys from the Abbey coming bird-nesting here, so I tell you for oncel!" croaked Amos. "Don't you never try it on no more!"

"You forget I'm the son of the owner and I have a right to come here!" retorted Arthur haughtily.

"Owner? That's as may be. It ain't settled yet as far as I know. Anyway I'm caretaker here and I've got my orders. The house is let as a school, and boys from the Abbey has no right trespassing. Miss Brookes would have something to say I reckon. Off you go now!"

Feeling hugely indignant at the old man's insolence

yet not wishing to put him on the alert in case he might suspect the real reason of the climb, Arthur murmured something to the effect that they were all collecting eggs, and had not yet got a jackdaw's, then sauntered away, whistling, as if he were in no hurry and that the affair did not matter in the least. All the same he felt baffled. If it were a contest of wits between Bevans and Griffiths the latter had undoubtedly won the one point in the game.

Miss Brookes had put the crucifix carefully away, and she was anxious to show it to the Rev. Howard Carter, who was an expert on archæology. They attended his church at the village of Beauley on Sunday afternoons, but he had promised to conduct them some day round his parish church at Abdon Mortimer, which he assured them was well worth seeing. She therefore wrote to remind him, and made an appointment to bring any girls who might be interested to meet him at the church on the following Saturday morning. She issued the invitation to the school, but only a dozen responded. There were counter-attractions in the way of gardening, picking black currants and other occupations that many considered more to their taste than the study of church architecture. Moreover it was a four-mile walk, the weather was hot, and if they were to be bored at the end by the dissertations of the old rector, what was the use of it?

Rather disappointed at this lack of enthusiasm on the part of her girls, Miss Brookes started off with her select few, which consisted entirely of upper seniors with the addition of Marian, who hoped she

might gain some information about the crucifix. They tramped along dusty highroads under a broiling sun till they finally arrived at Abdon Mortimer, and were glad to go into the cool shelter of the ancient church, where the rector awaited them, smiling a benevolent welcome.

It was a glorious old church, well worth the long hot walk. It dated from the early fourteenth century, and had beautiful pillars and arches, lovely stained-glass windows, a number of sculptured monuments, and carved bench-ends. Mr. Carter escorted them round with great pride, showing them all the details. He pointed out a very ancient tomb, on which was carved in stone the figure of a knight in chain armour, whose feet rested on some animal that resembled neither a lion nor a dog.

"It's meant for a wild boar," he explained. "The brute had ravaged the neighbourhood, and it was slain at last by Sir Geoffrey de Senlis, so it was represented here on his grave. Notice the hour-glass on the pulpit! We have it chained for fear some unrighteous collector of antiques might steal it. It belongs to the days when parsons preached long sermons, and the hour-glass was to remind them if they exceeded the time limit. No doubt they preached too long, and some of the congregation went to sleep, for in the parish register of 1650 there is an entry of a sum of money to be paid annually to a 'sluggard-waker', whose duty was to arouse those members who were slumbering, and to a 'dog whipper' who had to turn dogs out of church. Evidently the dogs came to church with the farmers, and did not always behave

with discretion, probably there was sometimes a fight. In the tower we still preserve a great jug called 'the ringers' pitcher'. It has on it this inscription:

“ From London I was sent
As plainly doth appear.
It was to this intent
To be filled with strong beer.

Please remember the pitcher when empty.

I need hardly say our bell-ringers don't drink beer now in the tower.”

“ The font is curious,” remarked Miss Brookes.

“ Yes, it's extremely old, and probably dates from the Saxon church which was here before this present church was built. It used to have a wooden cover with hinges, and was always kept locked. Can you guess why? To keep the dust out? No. To prevent birds getting in? No. It was for a much more peculiar reason—to keep away witches, who, in that superstitious age, were supposed to be able to work evil spells by means of water stolen from a church font. Over here is our chained Bible, it dates from the seventeenth century, when the big Bibles had to be fastened with chains to the book rests in churches, to prevent their being stolen. This one was supposed to possess healing power, and people used to come from miles around to touch it and be delivered from disease. The ancient faiths seem to have died out in this present century.”

“ I've brought something to show you to-day,” said Miss Brookes, producing the crucifix and handing it to him. “ What do you think of this?”

204 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Mr. Carter examined it with a gleam in his eye as one who sees a pearl of great price.

"Where did you get it?" he asked eagerly.

Miss Brookes explained the whole story of its finding in the corridor and he listened with rapt attention.

"Fourteenth century undoubtedly," he commented. "And a fine piece of silver work. I should say it must certainly have belonged originally to Maenan Abbey. How it came to be found in the Grange is mysterious, very mysterious indeed. Will you lend it to me? I should like to show it to some members of our County Archæological Society, who are keen experts on monastic silver. It would be of deep interest to them."

"Oh, certainly, if it is mine to lend," said Miss Brookes. "I suppose it belongs to Mr. Bevan, really, as it was found at the Grange, but no doubt he wouldn't mind lending it to *you*."

"I'll undertake to keep it safely and return it to him," agreed the rector.

Marian had listened intently to his conversation, though she made no remark. She was glad the crucifix was to be placed in the rector's safe-keeping and could only trust that, as he seemed to be aware of its significance, his investigations might lead to some discovery of the mystery that hung about the Grange, and which was baffling the best efforts of herself and Arthur. She felt tempted to confide in Mr. Carter, but there was no opportunity for a private conversation with him, and she could not blurt out her story in the presence of Miss Brookes, who would naturally ask why she had not been told before. Also the other girls

were standing round listening. No, for the present she must preserve silence and hope for the best.

“Well, it’s been a most fascinating morning! Thank you very much!” said Miss Brookes as they took leave of the rector in the porch. “It’s really been a succession of interesting things!”

“And particularly interesting to me,” thought Marian, as they set out to walk back to Maenan Grange.

CHAPTER XVI

Mixed Pickles

Hilda, left out by Marian from the investigations which she and Arthur were making into the mysteries of Maenan Grange, was nevertheless enjoying life in her own way among the juniors. She had made special chums with Beryl and Shirley, and the trio were ready for any kind of fun, not to say mischief. Since the affair of the dormitory feast, when Hester had proved amenable to the offer of chocolate biscuits and had not reported them, they had regarded her as a prefect with a tender heart, and were inclined to take surreptitious advantage of her. Hester, very busy with other matters, was perhaps disposed sometimes to turn a blind eye to their misdoings, to save herself trouble, then otherwise her conscience would prick her, she would remind herself of the duties in which she took so much pride, and would exhibit herself in an astonishingly severe light, greatly to their consternation.

206 Mystery of the Moated Grange

In an intermittent way they kept up their secret society though they had not used the signal of the Fiery Cross for a long time. Hilda, who loved such performances, had not forgotten it, and one day a scheme occurred to her which seemed to justify its use. She determined to summon a meeting of the society. She charred the orthodox piece of wood, and passed it to Beryl, who handed it on with the cryptic words "the big oak, quarter past four", till each member had received the message.

At the very top of the garden was a clump of trees, including a great oak, whose huge bowl and some overhanging boughs would shelter them from observation if they sat at the far side of it. Here therefore they retired at the hour named, and squatting close together on the ground found themselves quite shielded from view by anyone passing below. With heads together they began their conference. There was one portion of the garden that for the present had been declared out of bounds by Miss Brookes. It contained ripe raspberries and some special espaliered cherry trees trained against a brick wall. For excellent reasons she considered it taboo for the school, some of whom regarded it with envious eyes.

"Are we all pledged to strict secrecy?" began Hilda solemnly.

"We are!" declared the others.

"Do you swear not to betray any other member under any circumstances whatever?"

"We do!"

"Well, I have a proposition to make. You know the part of the garden that has been placed out of bounds?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Now I ask you to whom does the garden of the Grange belong? To the owner or to Miss Brookes?"

"I should say to the owner," ventured Beryl.

"Right you are! My father is the owner, and therefore the fruit in it is his. As he isn't here, and I am his daughter, I consider I have some right to that fruit."

The girls looked at one another and nodded. The argument was attractive if not entirely conclusive.

"Old Amos Griffiths is probably taking toll of it," continued Hilda. "I wouldn't trust him."

"No, he helps himself, no doubt!"

"He's an old scamp!"

"Where do all the raspberries go to?"

"I'm sure *we* don't get them all!"

"That's the point," urged Hilda. "I'm certain my father would wish us to have them, whatever Miss Brookes may say about it."

"Write and ask him!" suggested Peggy.

"There isn't time: no, I can't do that. He doesn't answer letters very quickly. We must take the matter into our own hands."

"Raid the garden?"

"We'd be caught!"

"There'd be a jolly row!"

"Still, we'd all be in it, I suppose."

"You're supposing too quickly," snapped Hilda.

"Be quiet a minute and let me speak."

"All right, go on!"

"Well, my idea is this: a few of us—say four—must get up very early, pick what we want and share it round privately afterwards."

208 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Couldn't you do it better by yourself?"

"*No, I could not,*" declared Hilda indignantly. "Those who share the spoil must run the risk! I have spoken! As the Zulus say."

"Oh! Well, who's to go?"

"Had we better draw lots?"

"Good idea, only Hilda must be one herself."

"Yes, she's not to sneak out of it."

"I don't want to sneak out of it," retorted Hilda, "but I must have three of you to help me. I propose we count out, and choose that way."

"Very well, let's begin."

So, taking one of the old counting-out rhymes they went round the circle and fixed upon Shirley, Beryl and Isobel, who pledged themselves to arise early next morning for the daring deed. The others likewise agreed that by their solemn oath they would never under any penalties reveal the identities of the raiders, if the fruit were missed.

"So that's settled. The palaver is finished!" declared Hilda, with the solemnity of an African chief.

"Hello! What have you kids been up to?" inquired Hester, as the members of the society of the Fiery Cross were in the act of dispersing. She had missed them, and had been hunting round the garden for them.

"Only playing games!" replied Hilda airily.

Hester looked at them keenly. To her mind they presented a somewhat guilty air.

"You scooted off in such a hurry you forgot to put away your books and wipe the blackboard and

tidy your room!" she reproached. "Go at once and do it now. You've left things in a regular mess, and you know the room's wanted for French class after tea."

Anxious for any opportunity to remove themselves from the vicinity of the prefect the juniors fled to the house and busied themselves with monitresses' duties.

"You don't suppose she heard?" whispered Beryl.

"No, how could she? She only came when we'd finished."

"She has sharp ears though, and she might have been lingering about before we noticed," put in Shirley anxiously.

"Nonsense! Don't fuss! It's all right!" snorted Hilda.

Early next morning, before the gong aroused the rest of the school, four stealthy figures stole downstairs and, avoiding Mrs. Griffiths who was lighting the kitchen fire, made a quick exit into the forbidden portion of the garden. They had providently hidden baskets outside, which they retrieved, and were soon busily at work filling them, and also popping luscious morsels into their own mouths.

But if they had arisen early, so had Amos Griffiths, to attend to his duties, and stumping towards the raspberry bushes he noticed the intruders, and raised a shout of wrath.

"I'll learn you to steal my fruit!" he bellowed.

The girls fled instantly, dodging round the bushes. Fortunately for them he was rather lame, and they had time to scramble over a fence and escape into the meadow before he could overtake them.

210 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Much flustered, they made a circuitous route back to the house, and after concealing their baskets in one of the cowsheds, they managed to reach the sanctuary of their dormitories just before the gong sounded for the school to arise. So far they were safe, and congratulated themselves on their escape. After breakfast they shared what raspberries they had retrieved with the rest of their members.

"Not very many, are there?" pronounced Nellie.

"You must have eaten a lot yourselves," sniffed Mary.

"We didn't, I tell you," denied Shirley. "We'd no time to gather any more. Amos was after us and we scooted like blazes."

"Oh, well, they're good, such as there are of them," approved Kathleen.

"You may be glad to get any at all," said Hilda. "We were nearly caught. Thank goodness we got away safely. He hadn't time to spot who we were. He's shortsighted. I think we may consider ourselves out of trouble."

There is such a thing as congratulating oneself too soon, as Hilda found to her cost. Amos might be disposed to appropriate some of the fruit to his own use but he much objected to the school raiding the garden. Seeing Hester later in the day, and knowing she was a prefect, he complained that some younger girls had been up early and stealing raspberries.

"Four of them, I counted, though I couldn't rightly say which they was. I'll be glad if you'll report it to Miss Brookes. I'm not going to be accused of taking the fruit when it's her own lot as does it, not I.

What with the birds and all there won't be much left on the bushes," he grumbled.

"All right, I'll attend to the matter, and see that the girls don't go trespassing again," replied Hester.

"They'd better not, or there won't be no raspberry jam made for them."

Now Hester ought really to have reported this to Miss Brookes, but she liked the importance of her position as prefect, and thought she was justified in dealing with the affair herself. Surely it was part of her duties to do so. She therefore summoned all the juniors together in their classroom, after school, and taxed them with the deed.

"Will those girls who were in the garden this morning hold up their hands!" she commanded.

Nobody responded.

"It's no use denying it," she frowned. "I ask you again, which are the four girls whom Amos saw?"

Dead silence prevailed. Each member of the society respected her oath and would not betray the four. They sat with mouths firmly shut and eyes cast down.

"So you're obstinate! Very well, I know how to deal with you. I shall take hostages, and hold them responsible for punishment. I'm going to count out every fifth girl, and those girls will go without their ration of sweets to-morrow. I'm in charge of the sweet-stall this Saturday, as it happens."

"Will this be kept private?" asked Shirley anxiously.

Thinking she might possibly be exceeding her authority, and that it would be as well for the matter

212 Mystery of the Moated Grange

not to reach the ears of Miss Brookes, she agreed, as though making a great favour.

"You don't deserve it, you're behaving very badly, but I won't report you this time. Miss Brookes would consider such a greedy act was a slur on the school. We won't upset her if we can help it. Now I'm going to count, and every fifth girl must stand up."

Only one of the real transgressors was among the victims, and that was Shirley. Hilda, Beryl and Isobel escaped. The sufferers as hostages bore their reprisals well, and made no murmur. They were absolutely loyal to their oath.

Among catering arrangements for her evacuated school Miss Brookes was given a limited allowance of sweets, mostly acid drops and pear drops, just enough for a ration of one ounce per week for each girl. These were distributed on Saturday mornings, and it was the duty of one of the prefects, in turn, to weigh the little packets and hand them out. It was Hester's turn this Saturday, which was a piece of luck for her, as she was able to carry out her plan of punishment without even informing her fellow-prefects. She had an uneasy feeling that Beatrice might not altogether approve of her methods, and she liked to go her own way without comment. The "hostages", as she named them, discreetly absented themselves from the distribution, but the others made up to them for their loss by pooling their own shares, and then re-dividing them with scrupulous care, even to the extent of half a pear drop to make the packets equal.

"So that's that!" decided Hilda. "We haven't come off so badly after all."

"No, I thought it meant reporting," admitted Shirley.

"What will Hester do with the sweets that were left over?" asked Mary.

"Oh, just put them back in the bag. She won't appropriate them herself, I'm sure."

"No, I'll say that for her. She's too big a sport for that!"

"If I can wangle any sweets at Leomford this afternoon I'll bring them back for a share-out, chocs if possible, though I don't suppose there'll be any, unless a few bars," said Isobel generously.

"Oh, *do*, if you can. You three are luckers!" urged Mary.

"Yes, we're living for this afternoon," sighed Peggy.

Owing to shortage of petrol very few parents had been able to visit their evacuated daughters, but that very morning Isobel had received a letter from her father, who was in the army, to say he would be motor-ing in the neighbourhood, and with her head mistress's permission he would call for her that afternoon and take her to Leomford for tea, and bring her back to the Grange. Also that, if she liked, she could bring two of her companions with her. Isobel had hurried to Miss Brookes, shown the letter, and had received the desired exits. The choice of two friends was a difficulty, but she decided to invite Peggy and Hilda. They accepted with the utmost alacrity. It was seldom they had the chance of such a treat. It seemed almost like a return of old times.

Isobel's father duly arrived at half-past two, in a

214 Mystery of the Moated Grange

chocolate coloured Morris four-seater car, and accompanied by another khaki-clad officer. He was rapturously greeted by his daughter, was introduced to Miss Brookes, and the visitors were shown on a hasty tour round the Grange. Having approved of the school's evacuation quarters, and seeing the anxiety of his daughter and her friends to be off, Captain Forrester packed the three girls into the back seat of the car, bade good-bye to the head mistress, promising to return her pupils after tea and started his engine.

It was only a short run to Leomford, and on arrival there he inquired what they would like to do first. With one accord they replied: "The cinema, please!"

"Just like kids!" laughed his friend. "I dare say they don't often get the chance of seeing a film out there in the country."

"All the better for them, perhaps," assented Captain Forrester. "However, it's their treat to-day, so they must choose. Come along then, girls! I'll park the car in the market square. Now tell me where your cinema is. Are you coming with us, Dalton?"

"I admit I have a weakness for a good film sometimes, so I'll be one of the kids this afternoon," asserted Captain Dalton.

Thus escorted they reached the "Plaza", outside which was a flaming poster of two aeroplanes, and they were soon in comfortable seats watching a thrilling series of episodes in which a romantic heroine, who lived among the Sierras, was kidnapped by gangsters, and after a number of amazing adventures was finally rescued by her lover, who swooped down

in a plane and carried her away safely, after having a dog-fight in the air with the plane of his rival, who wished to marry her for the sake of her money. They sat it out till the happy finish, stayed for the Pathé pictures and a short comic interlude, then, as another long film was about to begin, Captain Forrester declared it was getting time for tea and that they had better adjourn. Leaving the cinema he picked up the car again and they drove to a café, where he parked the Morris just opposite the door, and they all entered.

They were regaled with a most sumptuous tea, far more than they could have expected in war-time, though perhaps the presence of two officers accounted for some of the lavishness. They had a variety of cakes and even ices, and as much of these delicacies as they wished, supplied by assiduous waitresses.

"Take all you can while you can get it!" encouraged Captain Dalton. "I don't suppose you have many cakes at school."

"We don't indeed," confessed Isobel, finishing her second ice.

"Leomford seems well supplied, better than where we come from, Dalton?" said Captain Forrester.

"Yes, these little country towns often fare better than the cities. They don't feel the war so much. Do I see sweets over there on the counter?"

The café was also a confectioner's shop, and turning round they certainly saw several promising large bottles, which evoked smiles of anticipation from the girls.

"Let's see what we can do about it. My show this time please!" insisted Captain Dalton.

216 Mystery of the Moated Grange

He bought three large packets, as much as an indulgent assistant would allow to one customer in war-time scarcity, and bestowed them on Isobel, Hilda and Peggy.

"Just something to take back with you!" he remarked, waving away their thanks.

"Yes, we must be going back!" declared Captain Forrester, looking at his watch. "I'd no idea it was so late. Run and get into the car, girls, while I settle up the bill. I shan't be long."

The three friends, exulting over their sweets, passed through the door of the café, and seeing the chocolate coloured car still at the side of the pavement, they scrambled in and, settling themselves in the back seat, began to talk about the film.

"Daddy won't be long!" said Isobel.

"They're here now!" agreed Peggy.

Two khaki-clad figures sprang into the front seat, the engine started and the car drove off. At first the girls were too occupied in discussing the film and in rejoicing over the parcels of sweets to take any notice of the road, but after a little time Hilda looked through the window and announced in a puzzled tone:

"This isn't the way we came, surely!"

Peggy on the other side peered out, and agreed.

"This certainly isn't the road back to Maenan."

"Is Dad taking us round another way?" asked Isobel.

"Just to give us a longer joy-ride perhaps," chuckled Peggy, with an approving glance at the khaki backs in front.

At that moment the man at the wheel turned to speak

to his companion and in so doing showed his side face.

"O-oh! Oh! That's not Daddy!" gasped Isobel.

"What! Who is it?"

"I don't know!"

"O-oh! are we being kidnapped?" faltered Hilda.

"What *are* we to do?"

"Shall we jump out?"

Mindful of the film they had just witnessed the girls imagined the worst, and fully believed they were being carried off by gangsters. Peggy turned the handle of the door, ready in her agitation to make a leap for safety, but Hilda had more sense, and realizing the speed at which they were travelling and the danger of such an exit she yelled loudly:

"No! No! Don't! You'd be killed!"

The noise of the car had hitherto drowned their voices, but at Hilda's sudden shriek the man next to the driver looked round.

"Good gracious! Stop! Stop!" he shouted to his companion.

The brakes were applied and the car came to a grinding halt. The driver also turned and two astonished faces regarded the girls.

"Hello! What have we got here?" asked one.

"Whoever are you?" inquired the other.

The girls were still too uncertain whether they were being kidnapped to make any reply.

"Stowaways?" asked the driver.

"Trying to snatch a joy ride?" queried his friend.

"We—we—thought we were in Daddy's car!" wailed Isobel, with tears streaming down her pink cheeks.

218 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Her daddy's in khaki too!" blurted Peggy, almost equally perturbed.

"Oh, I see. Got into the wrong car by mistake! Here, don't cry! Where did you hitch-hike on to us?"

"Outside the café," volunteered Hilda.

"There certainly was another Morris car just like ours standing there," said the driver. "We parked ours in front of it. You kids must have scrambled in without noticing."

"We thought it was Daddy's car," moaned Isobel, wiping her eyes.

"Well, I suppose we must run you back. Luckily we've not gone many miles. Cheer up!"

"Things might be worsel!" laughed the friend good naturedly.

"We'd no idea we were shipping such a cargo. I never looked in the back seat," guffawed the driver. "A surprise for us—rather!"

He started the engine again, turned the car at a convenient corner, and drove back towards Leomford.

Meantime Captain Forrester, having paid his bill at the counter, emerged from the café, and finding his car empty stared round for the girls.

"What's become of the kids?" inquired Captain Dalton.

"I don't know. They must have scooted off somewhere, bother them!"

"Perhaps they've run across the road to a shop."

"That's possible. Hope they won't be long. I don't want to wait. I must be getting on. It's late."

"I'll ask if anyone has seen them."

A lady was standing on the pavement and in reply to his inquiry she stated: "Three little girls? Why yes, I saw them get into a car just now and drive away."

"A car! What car?" ejaculated Captain Forrester.

"One just like that!" and she pointed to his own.

"Great Scott! Who drove it?"

"Two officers got in."

"Heavens! The silly little idiots must have jumped into the wrong one. Now what's to be done?"

"Best go to the police office," advised Captain Dalton.

"I certainly will, if you'll stay here in case whoever's taken them brings them back. I can't risk missing them again. Who'd be a father?"

"Poor kids!"

"Poor kids indeed, it's poor Daddy!"

A much perturbed Captain Forrester inquired his way to the police station, where he was required to state a full description of the missing girls, but as the lady who saw them enter the car had not noticed its number, and could not tell in what direction it had gone except "up the street", it was impossible to telephone to any man on duty to have it stopped. He wasted a considerable amount of time arguing about means of recovering the runaways, and finally returned to the café bewailing what he considered the inefficiency of the police force in such an emergency.

"I can't leave Leomford without finding out what's become of them," he reiterated for the third time.

"No, no, of course not," agreed Captain Dalton.

Matters seemed to have reached a deadlock, and

both were feeling somewhat desperate when a chocolate coloured Morris four-seater appeared in the street and drew up before the café. Its door opened and out hopped the three girls.

"Thank heaven!" exploded Captain Forrester.

The two officers in the car also alighted, and there were many explanations given.

"We'd no idea they were in *our* car! Never looked at the back seat!"

"Only found it out when we'd run some miles!"

"It was *their* fault," apologized Captain Forrester.

"I'm sorry they've given you so much trouble. Many thanks for fetching them back—the young baggages! They'll be more careful another time. Come along, girls, I've got to run you to your school before I can get on the way myself. Sorry for this delay, Dalton!"

"Well," asserted Isobel, as the three settled themselves in the right car, "we weren't exactly kidnapped, but really it was very like being in a film, wasn't it?"

"I call it a real adventure," purred Hilda.

"Something to write home about!" prattled Peggy.

CHAPTER XVII

The Drumming Well

On the same Saturday that Hilda, Isobel and Peggy spent their exciting afternoon at Leomford Marian had affairs of her own to engage her attention. It was what she regarded as a "slack day". No particular

rambles or excursions had been arranged, and the girls were supposed to spend their time in working at their allotments, a patriotic contribution to the "Dig for Victory" campaign. Marian went to Miss Brookes and asked permission to spend the afternoon with her brother.

"I weeded my plot yesterday, and there's really nothing to do there to-day," she explained. "I thought we might go a walk together. I see so little of Arthur now!" she added wistfully.

Mrs. Bevan had made a request that if possible, without infringing school rules, the brother and sisters might be allowed some opportunities of meeting, so on this occasion Miss Brookes proved amiable, and replied: "Certainly, my dear. If he also is at liberty, take a walk together by all means."

Armed satisfactorily with this special exit, Marian set forth for the Abbey, and found Arthur busy working on his war-time plot. She helped him for a while, and then suggested:

"Oh, can't you drop it, and let's have a walk somewhere? I'm sure you've done enough for to-day, haven't you?"

He looked at a bed still unweeded, shook his head at first, then seeing her disappointed face, he relented.

"All right! I'll finish it this evening. Come along then! Where do you want to go? Up in the woods if you ask *me*."

Any ramble with Arthur, no matter where, was acceptable to Marian, so they started for a very desirable wood, at present full of foxgloves, and sat for a while watching birds and squirrels.

222 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"I'm still worrying my brains to try and think what the old monks could possibly have done with their treasures," he said, after a long pause of silence. "Some of our chaps have been digging in the Abbey ruins—they were fired with the idea after Mr. Carter's lecture—but of course they found nothing. In my opinion it was hidden somewhere at the Grange, though I don't tell them so. There's either a secret room, or—could it possibly have been sunk in the moat?"

"Or in the Drumming Well?" suggested Marian.

"By Jove! That's an idea! I've heard of things being dropped in wells for safety. I vote we investigate."

"Could we climb down? It's fearfully deep."

"We might let down a bucket and see if we could dredge anything up."

"Oh, Artie, *do* let us try. Let's go now!"

Marian sprang up, aflame with enthusiasm. She had not thought before of the well as a possible hunting-ground. It seemed likely, and no time like the present.

Together they returned towards the Grange, and stopped in the meadow which contained the well. It lay there, under the ancient hawthorn tree, its mossy broken wall now almost overgrown with deep herbage and nettles, but peeping down they could see the gleam of water at the bottom.

Remembering what she had found there some time ago, Marian searched among the herbage, nettling her fingers as she did so, and discovered the string, still tied to the tree. She raised it loop by loop, and

finally pulled up the old tin, full of mud. Arthur emptied it out on to the ground, but it contained nothing of interest.

“Who rigged this up?” he inquired.

“I’ve never found out. Some one did it for a rag, I expect, just after the rector’s lecture, to try and scare us. Some of the juniors declared they heard the well drumming, and nearly had fits, but the others just laughed at them. Miss Brookes was very down on superstitions and ghosts and such like things, and kept telling us not to be silly. I went by myself to look at the well, and found if I pulled the string the tin rattled. I knew it was a rag. Perhaps Patty did it. Just like her tricks! Or it might have been one of your boys from the Abbey, playing a joke on us girls to frighten us. Really I’d almost forgotten all about it till to-day.”

“If we had a bucket and a piece of rope,” suggested Arthur, “we might try dredging. Could you wangle some?”

“There’s an old bucket in the stable, and I dare say I might find some rope somewhere.”

“Well, go and look. I’ll stay here.”

Marian departed on her errand, and after a while returned with a rusty pail and a length of rather rotten rope.

“All I could find,” she proclaimed.

“Not too good, but we must make it do,” muttered her brother, tying the rope on firmly to the handle. He lowered the bucket and presently drew it up again containing something heavy. He emptied it on to the grass, but it was only mud and a few old tins.

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224 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"Someone's dumped rubbish here," he grunted in disappointment, turning them over.

"Try again!" ventured Marian.

So once more the pail was lowered, and appeared to receive another weighty consignment. Arthur was pulling it up with strong arms, and it had nearly reached the top, when alas! the rotten rope broke and down went the bucket to the bottom of the well, with a splash.

"Now you've done it!" exclaimed Marian.

"You should have brought a better rope!"

"Couldn't find anything else!"

"Beastly nuisance!"

"What's to happen now?"

"Nothing that I can see. Unless we can get another pail and rope."

"Which we can't!"

"I suppose we must try again another day."

"Nothing else for it."

"I might get a pail from the farm perhaps."

"You might; but what's the time? Quarter-past four! Heavens! I must scoot, Miss Brookes said we were all to be in hall at twenty past for a committee meeting, before tea. She's trying to get up a pageant or something in aid of the Red Cross, and she wants us to discuss it. Look at my muddy hands! I must wash them before I go in. Ta-ta!"

Marian departed without further ceremony, and Arthur remained standing by the well, watching her flying figure. He felt discouraged by the failure of this effort, but he was determined not to be baffled in his investigations. It occurred to him that as the girls and

probably all the teachers would be indoors at their meeting this would be a good opportunity for him to take a solitary stroll round the premises unobserved. As representative of his father, the owner of the Grange, he constituted himself a private detective, who, as a sleuth like those of fiction, might somehow be able to pick up clues. Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and Mr. Fortune, whose adventures he had lately been reading, would certainly have done so, and undoubtedly would have met with success. So he strolled down to the outbuildings, and began a cautious round among the cowsheds and stables, on the look-out for anything that might attract keen observation. The career of a criminal investigator appealed to him.

He was dodging round the fold-yard, when he noticed Mrs. Griffiths coming from the direction of the house. She walked across the yard, and vanished inside a stable door. She could not have been gone more than a minute before Arthur had stalked her, and was peeping with utmost caution round the door. Amos was in the stable, attending to a sick cow, and his wife was standing talking to him. After that one glimpse Arthur withdrew his head, but kept his ear to the chink of the door, listening intently. He must have missed their first remarks, yet he distinctly heard Amos mumbling something about "the moat".

"When are you going to do it?" asked Mrs. Griffiths in slightly more audible tones.

"To-night."

"Ay, there's a full moon on."

"That's right. I couldn't show a light, with them wardens prowling round."

226 Mystery of the Moated Grange

"They'll all be a-bed at the school."

"So much the better for my job."

"Well, I must be off! Here's your can of tea and a sandwich. So-long!"

Arthur, who had overheard every word of this brief conversation, edged away from the door and bolted into a shed near before Mrs. Griffiths could emerge. He waited till she had disappeared, then hastily walked off, in case Amos also might come out. He must not on any account allow them to know he had been within earshot. He felt he had at least discovered something of importance. What was Amos going to do to-night? Something evidently in connexion with the moat, that must be performed by moonlight, when the school was in bed. Was he going to fish up hidden treasure from the green slimy water? Were articles of value actually concealed there? It seemed a likely place for a cache.

"This needs looking into," mused Arthur. "Such a hint mustn't be missed. That moat shall be watched to-night at any cost."

Fully determined to spy on the old gardener's moonlight operations, Arthur wondered whether he would be able to cope with the matter entirely by himself, and came to the conclusion that he had better confide the secret to Cooper, a chum of his at the Abbey, and ask for his help. By good luck Mr. Derrick was away for the weekend, so the boys were only under the very nominal supervision of Mr. Lowman, the farmer, who did not trouble about them. The door of the farm was never bolted at night, it would be an easy matter to slip down from his bedroom, go to the barn where

Cooper slept, wake him, and set out on their expedition without anyone knowing. In his self-constituted position as guardian of his father's property he felt quite justified in such an action.

He found Eric Cooper in the allotments, lured him away to a quiet corner and revealed his plan. Eric was one of the boys who had been digging in the Abbey ruins on a vain hunt for the treasure, he was therefore immensely thrilled and enthusiastic.

"Oh, I say! I bet we're on the track!" he exclaimed.

"It certainly looks warm," ventured Arthur.

"Warm? Hot I should call it!"

"We'll have a try to-night anyhow."

"Rather! I'm game."

"I shall have to wait till the Lowmans are in bed. Then I'll come to you. But I don't want to wake the others. Which bunk do you sleep in?"

"The one next the door, and we always leave the door wide open at night to get air, so you'll only have to walk in quietly and give me a touch. I shan't undress. I'll be up in a sec. Good biz that old Derrick is away. He has sharp ears."

"Yes, it's a bit of luck."

Arthur bade a formal good night to the Lowmans that evening and retired to his room over the porch, hoping they also would soon go to bed. He did not undress, but sat up waiting to hear them walk upstairs. His patience, however, was sorely tried. A few of their friends had dropped in, and they sat in the parlour, with the door open, evidently enjoying a convivial evening. He peeped over the banisters and

228 Mystery of the Moated Grange

decided it would be impossible to go downstairs and slip past that open door without being noticed. There was nothing for it but to wait. It seemed a very long time before the guests took their departure, but at last he heard good-byes, and the sound of their retreating footsteps on the gravel path. Mrs. Lowman apparently was tidying the parlour to be ready for Sunday morning, after the festivities; she was far too good a housewife in his opinion. Would they never go to bed?

At length the clump of the farmer's heavy feet came on the stairs, accompanied by his wife's cough, and Arthur felt that the coast was now clear. With his shoes in his hand he stole down in his stockings, without any noise, quietly opened the front door and went out. He first sat down and put on his shoes, then made his way to the barn to arouse Cooper. His chum was sound asleep, but woke after a shake, and jumped up, being fully dressed except for his shoes, which he retrieved from underneath his bunk. Silently the two boys left the barn, where their companions slept on undisturbed.

While Eric put on his shoes, Arthur stood and surveyed the landscape. It was an ideal night. The full moon shone in a sky where a few clouds occasionally drifted across. The ruins of the old Abbey stood out in dark relief, the barns and haystacks were masses of black, and just visible was the sombre outline of the Grange, with moonlight gleaming brightly on the moat.

"Rather too good a target for planes, that moat, in my opinion," commented Eric, who was A.R.P. minded.

"I hope not, in this out-of-the-way place."

"One never knows. I heard a plane last night roaring overhead."

"It might be one of our own."

"It might, but on the other hand it might be a German one. Wish I was old enough to join the R.A.F. Think of gliding along in that sky! One would feel one could almost reach the moon."

"Well, you won't reach the moat if you stand still staring at the moon. Come along, and remember it's caution."

The two boys climbed over the fence into the grounds of the Grange, and taking what cover they could under the shelter of bushes they skulked their way to the moat. Here evidently something was going on. Arthur grasped Eric and drew him into the shade of a thick rhododendron.

"Look!" he whispered.

In the moat they could see the figure of Amos Griffiths in tall wading boots. He was stooping and lifting up something from out of the water, and flinging it back on to the bank. Several times he performed this action, and the moon shining down, showed a glint on the objects which he was retrieving.

"The treasure, by Jingo!" gasped Eric, and in his enthusiasm he forgot the caution enjoined by Arthur, and, bent on discovery, he rushed from out the shade of the rhododendron bush and yelled: "Hello! What are you doing there?"

The old gardener was so startled that he nearly fell into the water, but recovering himself he turned and came wading back to the bank.

At that moment a cloud totally obscured the moon, and he could only see two dark figures, without being able to distinguish their identity.

"What am I doing?" he replied testily. "Why, cleaning out the drain, to be sure! Sanitary inspector come over from Leomford and a fine fuss he made. Miss Brookes told me to do it at night, when all the school was abed. It's a smelly job I can tell you. If you're air raid wardens it's none of your business. I ain't been showing no light!"

"What have you got here?" asked Arthur, bending over the objects on the bank.

"Old tins! The moat is cluttered up with 'em this end, and they was stopping the drain."

The cloud which had temporarily darkened the scene now passed over, and the moon shone once more. By its light the boys could certainly see a collection of old tins, nothing of greater interest, though they hastily turned them over. The moon, however, revealed to Amos that he was not dealing with A.R.P. wardens, but with his sworn enemies—boys of the Abbey.

"What are *you* a-doing here?" he bawled. "Out at night when you ought to be in your beds at the farm! I'll tell your master of you, I will! And I hope he'll give you the stick. Get along with you, you young rascals! And if I catch you here again I'll——"

What his dire threat was Arthur and Eric did not wait to hear. As their investigations seemed fruitless they hastily removed themselves from the vicinity of the moat and beat a retreat back to the Abbey.

"D'you think he was *really* cleaning the drain?" panted Eric.

"I don't know. You jumped out on him too soon, Cooper! If we'd waited we might have seen more. Cleaning the drain might only have been a cover for fishing better things out of the moat."

"Well, we mustn't give up. We'll try sleuthing the old chap again sometime."

"Yes; I certainly shan't give up the hunt."

Arrived back at the farm Arthur again found himself balked. When he gently tried the door he could not open it. Mr. Lowman, for some reason, must have come downstairs again and shot the bolt. Undoubtedly Arthur was locked out. He did not dare to knock, so instead went into one of the barns, and stretching himself on a heap of straw went to sleep, and dreamed he was shovelling wonderful treasure from the moat and from the bottom of the well.

Early next morning it rained, a very heavy thunder shower which cleared up by breakfast time. Those girls at the Grange, who attended to the feeding of the poultry came running in with the news that the Drumming Well was making the most tremendous noise.

"You can't mistake it?"

"Just like a big drum!"

"Rum-tum-a-rum-tum-tum!"

"Is it the gipsy's curse?"

"What curse?"

"Oh, you know, that story the rector told us. One of the Bevans threw the gipsy's drum into the well, and the gipsy cursed him and said the drum would always begin drumming when any bad luck was going to happen to the family!"

"Is bad luck going to happen to them now?"

"It looks like a warning."

"These old stories often have something in them."

"Are you superstitious?"

"Perhaps I am."

"Look at Hilda! She's scared stiff."

"I may well be!"

"Why, has the old well drummed before?"

"Yes, just before Mummie went away, and that was bad luck."

"Don't be absurd, Hilda!" quoth Marian. "It's all silly nonsense, I tell you."

"Nonsense or not, the well's drumming, I heard it my own self, and I feel in my bones that something is going to happen to us Bevans!" replied Hilda, in awe-struck tones.

CHAPTER XVIII

An Unwelcome Arrival

Some of the girls teased Hilda about believing in bad omens, but others, who were superstitious, considered the drumming of the gipsy's well was more than a coincidence in connexion with something that happened the very next day, something that vitally concerned the fortunes of the Bevan family.

It was precisely at half-past ten, when Miss Brookes was giving a lesson on the history of English literature to the lower seniors, that a taxi rumbled up the drive and stopped at the Grange. Marian, who was sitting near the window, watched its arrival and saw a lady

and a little boy step out. She wondered idly who they were and why they had come so early on a Monday morning. She heard the bell ring loudly, then had to turn her attention to reply to a question about *Paradise Lost*, which the class was studying at the moment.

After a brief interval Mrs. Griffiths knocked at the door and asked to speak to Miss Brookes.

"What is it?" inquired the head mistress sharply. She disliked having a lesson interrupted.

"A lady to see you. She says it's urgent."

"Did you tell her I'm engaged?"

"Yes, I said you never saw anyone in the mornings, you were busy with the school, but she said she *must* see you."

"What's her name?"

"She didn't give her name, she only kept saying it was very urgent and she *must* see you on important business, so I showed her into your room."

Miss Brookes groaned inwardly. She had given general instructions that she was never to be disturbed when she was teaching, and she felt very much disinclined to interview this visitor now. It might only be someone begging for a subscription. On the other hand it might possibly be the parent of a prospective pupil, in which case it would be unwise to refuse to see her. Turning to her class she told the girls to write all they could remember of the life of John Milton, and that she would not be away for long. She then hastily made her way to the warden's room.

Her first glance, on opening the door, revealed a tall lady, smartly dressed and rather handsome, though overdone with too much lipstick, and a little boy of

234 Mystery of the Moated Grange

perhaps nine, who sat fidgeting on a chair and kicking the footrail.

"I shall have to tell her we don't take boys here, if that's her important business," thought Miss Brookes.

The lady rose and advanced with outstretched hand, saying: "I *hope* I'm not disturbing you!"

"Not at all!" murmured Miss Brookes politely but quite untruthfully.

"I simply *had* to come. It's a matter of such urgency."

"I'm afraid I haven't yet had your name?"

"Mrs. William Bevan," replied the visitor impressively.

"Oh! Are you any relation of Captain Bevan then?"

"I'm the widow of William Bevan, only son of the late Tristram Bevan, who owned this property."

"Oh!" ejaculated Miss Brookes again, feeling rather bewildered. She knew nothing about the affairs of the Bevan family beyond the fact that the school rented the Grange from them.

"This is my son Billy," continued the lady. "I've come over from Canada to claim the estate for him."

"But—I thought the Grange belonged to Captain Bevan," faltered Miss Brookes.

"Certainly not. You may or you may not be aware that according to the provisions of Mr. Tristram Bevan's will the property was to be held by his nephew Denis Bevan merely in trust pending the finding of the true heir, which is my son William, who will now succeed to his grandfather's estate. Come here, Billy, and shake hands with the lady!"

The little boy, who meanwhile had been wandering

round the room seemingly not interested in the conversation, advanced smiling sheepishly. He was a nice-looking child, strongly resembling his mother.

Miss Brookes, still overwhelmed with the suddenness of this revelation, gasped out:

"It's some time since Mr. Tristram Bevan died, isn't it?"

"Ah! No doubt you're wondering why we weren't installed here before! It's a long story. My husband and his father had unfortunately quarrelled and had held no communication for years. After Mr. Tristram's death his lawyers advertised for his son or heir, but by that time my poor husband himself was dead, and I had gone away from Canada with my boy to Montana, in the United States. Here we never saw a British newspaper, and it was only by the merest chance, through a friend receiving a copy of *The Times* by post, that I learnt what an inheritance was waiting for my son to claim. I brought him to London and interviewed the lawyers, who are making all arrangements. So here we are! We came to Leomford on Saturday to the Royal Hotel. I've brought Billy over at once to look at his property."

"I suppose you know the Grange is let as a school?" inquired Miss Brookes.

"I understand that from the lawyers. It's no doubt a temporary arrangement. I certainly won't disturb you till the end of your term. Meantime we'd like to look round the place. If you have a couple of bedrooms to spare we might move in from the hotel at once. We'd like to be on the spot and we'd pay our share of the housekeeping."

236 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Horried at such a suggestion Miss Brookes hastily replied: "I'm sorry, but we're full to overflowing with our girls. There isn't a vacant bed in the house!"

"Oh, well, that's a pity. I must see if I can find lodgings at one of the farms near. Can you give me any addresses?"

"The Abbey Farm is full of evacuated boys. They're even sleeping in the barn."

"Is that so? Then I must try at some of the other farms. I want to be nearby."

"I'm afraid you won't find any accommodation."

"No? Well I'll go and inquire for myself. I'm generally lucky in that respect. By the way, the lawyers told me that two of Captain Denis Bevan's daughters are at your school. Is that right?"

"Yes, we have Marian and Hilda here, and their brother Arthur is with the boys evacuated at the Abbey Farm."

"I should like to see the girls. They're Billy's cousins. We must try and patch up old family quarrels and make friends. You'd like to see your cousins, wouldn't you, Billy?"

The boy gave a sickly smile without any due enthusiasm, and made no reply.

"Can you fetch them?" continued his mother persuasively.

"They're both in class at present, but it's nearly eleven o'clock, when we have our interval. I can bring them now if you wish."

"Thanks!"

Miss Brookes, very much upset by this most unexpected turn of affairs, went in search of Marian and

Hilda. She felt she must warn them of what had happened before they were introduced to Mrs. William Bevan. Calling them from their classrooms she briefly explained the situation, then led the two staggered and bewildered girls to the warden's room. Mrs. William Bevan greeted them with effusion, bestowing a smacking kiss upon each.

"Well now, how nice to meet you!" she exclaimed. "Which is Hilda and which is Marian? Here's your cousin, Billy! Shake hands, Billy, with your cousins!"

The girls, almost paralysed at the event, stood silent and unresponsive, but Billy offered a hand to each in turn, and his mother babbled on.

"I know you'll all become friends. I suppose Arthur is at school? You'll like to meet Arthur, won't you, Billy? Now may we look round the Grange? We're just longing to see everything. Nice old place it seems, quite the country manor! Come with us, girls, and show us round!"

In any usual circumstances Miss Brookes would not have shown visitors round the School in the morning, but these circumstances were most unusual, and she could not refuse admission to the new owners. She led the way therefore, and Mrs. William Bevan followed, with Marian and Hilda in unwilling attendance, and Billy making up the rear. The classes were just emerging for the eleven o'clock lunch interval, and girls stared in much amazement at the procession. "Some friends of the Bevans I suppose", was the general conclusion.

The stolidly silent Billy and his talkative mother were taken to inspect the big hall and some other

238 Mystery of the Moated Grange

portions of the Grange, then, Miss Brookes mentioning that it was a busy morning, Mrs. William Bevan took the hint and said they must return to their taxi, which waited on the drive.

"We're delighted with it all! Aren't you pleased, Billy? To think it's all yours! You lucky boy! Well, we must say good-bye now, but you'll be seeing us again very soon I expect. We haven't explored the garden yet, but that will do another day. We must go now and try and find lodgings. Good-bye, Marian! Good-bye, Hilda! Glad to have met you!"

When the taxi drove off down the drive, Marian turned to her sister with a face full of consternation.

"So that's that!" she sighed.

"I told you the Drumming Well meant something!" exclaimed Hilda. "You wouldn't believe me, but it *did!*"

"We shall have to tell Arthur!"

"Do Dad and Mums know?"

"It's an absolute bombshell!"

"Shattered our hopes."

"I shall write to Mums at once."

"I suppose the lawyers can't do anything?"

"You mean for Dad? How can they if this boy is really the heir?"

"So the Grange won't belong to Daddy now?"

"No. Hateful, isn't it?"

"We're turned out. What about the school?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything! Everything is horrid!"

Trying to keep back some tears Marian ran into the house, for the gong was sounding to recall pupils to

their classes. Perhaps the most bitter thing to her was the knowledge that she would have to explain the situation to her form-mates, and that they must soon become aware that the Bevan family was disinherited. She had been so proud that the Grange belonged to her father, she had always preserved the attitude that they were the owners, and that the school was merely billeted upon them for evacuation. She had even been fussy about the antique furniture being damaged, as it was their property. Now all this would be changed. All would belong to Billy, and they would have no more right of possession than had any of the girls who composed the school. It was no use looking for hidden treasure, as, if found, it would belong to the new owner. A very crushed and despondent Marian toiled through a lesson in algebra, with a mind so far away that her answers were all wrong.

She need not have worried about breaking the bad news to her form. Hilda had immediately whispered it to her friends, who passed it on, and by dinner-time it had spread all over the school. Even the prefects were aware of it. Some of them offered sympathy to Marian, which she received rather ungraciously. She did not appreciate being pitied. Hilda, on the contrary, revelled in being a centre of romantic attraction, like a heroine of fiction, and bewailed their fallen fortunes to an interested audience, who were quite keen to see Billy for themselves and make the acquaintance of the new heir.

"It's like a story," affirmed Isobel. "I remember reading a book about a lovely girl—Veronica I think her name was—her father lost all his money

240 Mystery of the Moated Grange

and they became terribly poor. Shall *you* be very poor now?"

"No, indeed, why should we?" flared Hilda.

"Oh, only that of course you're losing the Grange!"

"Well, Dad's in the army!"

"Yes—yes—don't get cross about it! In the story I read Veronica had to be sent to an orphanage."

"We're not orphans, thank you!"

"I know, but I was wondering if the school will go on at the Grange here."

"That I can't tell you," snapped Hilda, somewhat disgruntled at the turn the conversation had taken. The sympathetic interest of her friends seemed going too far.

Directly afternoon classes were over Marian, without even asking for permission, tore across the fields to the Abbey to await Arthur's arrival and break the ill news. He came as usual with his bicycle, and she beckoned him excitedly into a quiet place where they could talk alone. He bore the blow with Spartan fortitude.

"So that's over, and the end of great expectations!" he remarked gloomily.

"Aren't you surprised?"

"Yes, naturally, yet perhaps this is what Dad meant when he said taking on the Grange was a gamble."

"I wonder what *he* thinks about it?"

"Obviously he'll be disappointed."

"I shall write to Mum's to-night and tell her everything. Do you think she or Dad will come over?"

"I don't see what good that would do. They

couldn't change things now. I suppose it's for the lawyers to settle."

"We hoped Mums would be here for the holidays. The school's all going away for August, and I was looking forward to having the Grange to ourselves. We can't share it with these—these interlopers!"

"I'm afraid *we* shall be considered the interlopers now!" grunted Arthur, shaking his head.

When Arthur entered the farm he found that Mr. and Mrs. Lowman were already aware of the news and were agog with excitement about it. It seemed that Mrs. William Bevan, after leaving the Grange that morning, had motored round to several of the farms near inquiring for lodgings, and had finally found them at Birch Hill, about half a mile away. At each place where she called she had explained who she was, and that her boy was the heir to the property. The story spread like wildfire, and in a few hours was all over the neighbourhood. The man with the grocery van retailed it to every customer, women heard it at the little village shop, and stopped at cottages to inform their friends; it is amazing in how short a space of time news can be carried in a country district. The general opinion seemed to be that they wished poor Will Bevan could have lived to enjoy his old home himself—badly treated he was by his father and no wonder he ran off—but he seemed to have left a fine boy, and the lad would step into his grandfather's shoes.

Marian wrote a lengthy epistle to her mother that evening containing full descriptions of Mrs. William Bevan and Billy. She put it in the letter-box for the

242 Mystery of the Moated Grange

postman to take when he called early next morning. In the course of a couple of days she received a reply to this effect.

"Of course your father and I always anticipated the possibility of an heir turning up, so we were not so surprised as you imagine. Dad got leave and went to London to see the lawyers. Mrs. William Bevan had shown her credentials, her marriage certificate, her son's birth certificate, and her husband's death certificate. They seemed quite in order. The lawyers have written to Canada to verify these, but there is no doubt they are genuine, and that Dad must resign all claim to the property. Certainly it is a great disappointment, but it can't be helped and we must just make the best of it. No, I am not coming back to the Grange. What would be the use? I am very busy with my hostel here, and shall stick to my war work. We will make some arrangement for your holidays. Perhaps you can all go to stay with Aunt Netta at Keswick, if she has room for you, though I rather fear she has evacuees from Manchester billeted upon her. However that remains to be seen, and I'll let you know later on. Don't break your heart over the Grange! It was a beautiful thing that came suddenly into our lives, and has as suddenly passed out again. We will just treasure it as a very delightful remembrance."

Marian really tried to reconcile herself to the inevitable, bracing herself up with such proverbs as "what can't be cured must be endured" and "look on the bright side of everything", but it was a difficult situation, and despite the proverbs she went about looking moody and depressed.

Meanwhile Miss Brookes found Mrs. William Bevan a great embarrassment. She and Billy haunted the Grange, and, though they did not actually intrude into classrooms during lesson time, they rambled about the house, and were constantly in the garden, helping themselves to the fruit—which after all was theirs—and generally appearing to take possession of the whole place. Miss Brookes felt that she must just put up with it. The school was in a difficult position. It was evidently uncertain whether their evacuation could continue after the holidays, and would depend on the education committee and the lawyers.

Mrs. William Bevan spoke as though she anticipated establishing herself there very soon. She mentioned improvements she intended to make.

“Another bathroom, of course, and I think I shall have the moat drained. I don’t like all that nasty stagnant water so near to the house. It can’t be healthy. And some of those trees must come down, to let in more air. We feel stifled here after the great spaces we’re used to in Canada and Montana.”

“I’m afraid she’ll spoil the old place when she once begins,” thought Miss Brookes. “Pity not to leave it as it is. She can’t turn it into a new-world home, when it’s centuries old. I don’t fancy she values the antique side of it. However it’s none of my business after all. We’re only tenants, and temporary ones at that.”

The old caretakers had received the newcomers with guarded stolidity. What they thought of the matter they did not divulge to outsiders, though no doubt they discussed it in private. One morning,

244 Mystery of the Moated Grange

watching Billy as he rambled round the stables, Mrs. Griffiths remarked to her husband:

"He's not much like his father, is he?"

"No, favours his mother, *he* does!" grunted Amos.

"I mind that I nursed Willie when he was a baby, and that's more than thirty years ago!"

"Ay, pity the poor lad couldn't 'a come home himself!"

"I believe his father hoped he would."

"Ay, but he was too proud to give way and ask him."

"There'll be some changes when *she* takes over!"

"I can believe you! She must always have been the 'grey mare' if you ask me."

"What about *us*?"

But Amos shook his head, and muttering it was time to feed the pigs, caught up a bucket and went to the kitchen for the potato peelings that were boiling on the fire.

Marian avoided the vicinity of the heir and his mother as much as she possibly could, but Hilda, who was naturally of a friendly disposition, made overtures to Billy. He was rather an attractive-looking boy. Though his birth certificate dated him as eight years and three months he was certainly tall and sturdy enough for nine or even ten, and, like most colonials, very mature for his age. He responded to her advances with reserve. It was difficult to induce him to talk much, though she persevered in her efforts to get to know him better.

"What do you think of the Grange?" she asked him, anxious to know his views on his new inheritance.

"Oh, it's well enough," he answered half-heartedly. "Queer old place! England seems so small, with its funny little fields all surrounded by hedges. You should just see our big ranches out west, miles without a fence! That's a country, if you like!"

"But this is the land of your ancestors!" insisted Hilda solemnly.

"Oh, blow my ancestors! I'd rather have a pony than half a dozen of 'em!"

"Did you go to school out in America?"

"You bet! Rode five miles there and five back every day."

"I suppose you'll go to a prep school here next September?"

Billy pulled an eloquent face, expressive of entire disapproval of such a prospect, and just then his mother came bustling up. She kept him closely to her apron strings. Hilda slipped away. She had found by experience that Mrs. William Bevan monopolized any conversation. In her presence her boy remained silent.

The other juniors were also interested in Billy. The fact that he was the heir invested him with a romantic fascination in their young eyes.

"It's just like a story," commented Beryl.

"Yes, think of suddenly finding oneself owner of an estate!" agreed Audley.

"*And the Grange!*" added Mary.

"I'm going to ask him for his autograph," declared Isobel.

Isobel was keen on autographs, so she fetched her blue morocco-bound book, and her stilo pen, and,

246 Mystery of the Moated Grange

escorted by her sympathizing friends, tracked Billy to the orchard, where he was devouring early green apples.

"Want me to write my name! What for?" he inquired.

"Because this is my autograph book, and I get distinguished people to write in it. See, I've airmen and authors, and an admiral of the navy!" replied Isobel, proudly turning the pages.

"Reckon you want *my* fist?"

"Please!"

"Sure. Give me your pen."

Billy sat down on a fallen tree, Isobel found a vacant page, handed him the stilo, and the girls stood looking over his shoulder. He began to make the inscription.

"Hello! you're putting an H!" affirmed Mary.

"D'you mean it for a B or a W?" questioned Beryl.

Billy hastily smudged the letter out with his finger.

"I wasn't thinking! Perhaps I'd better write William not Billy, as it's what you call an autograph."

"Yes, certainly William," pronounced Isobel.

So he wrote William Bevan, in neat round hand, and Isobel blotted it and closed the book, with a "Thanks very much!"

"You'll make yourself ill if you eat so many green apples!" warned Beryl.

"I expect you had lovely rosy ones in Canada," remarked Audley.

"You bet we have! Your apples here are wretched little sour things, though better than nothing," said Billy, recommencing to munch his half-eaten specimen.

"He's a queer boy," commented Beryl, as the girls walked away.

"Yes, always praising Canada above England."

"I wonder why he began to write H instead of W. He hasn't a second name, has he?"

"Not that I know of!"

"Oh, just carelessness, I expect," pronounced Isobel.

CHAPTER XIX

A Red Cross Fête

It was very nearly the end of the term, and Miss Brookes for some weeks had been evolving something in the way of a festival to close the period of their evacuation at Maenan, in case the school should not return to the Grange. She had always been uncertain what the education authorities meant to decide about it, and the advent of Mrs. William Bevan and her son, claiming the house, seemed to put a final stop to any hope of a further tenancy. While at Ashmont the High School had given an entertainment before Easter at the town hall, in aid of the Red Cross, and, though the elder girls were evacuated elsewhere, many of those at the Grange had taken part. She had therefore organized them and had held rehearsals, had ascertained that the costumes they had worn could be obtained from their homes, and decided that posters might be put up in Leomford and the neighbourhood announcing that a Garden Fête in aid of the Red Cross

248 Mystery of the Moated Grange

Fund would be held at Maenan Grange on the afternoon of Saturday, 26th July. Admission 1s., children 6d.

The Mayoress of Leomford promised to open the festivities, and suggested the addition of stalls for the sale of various articles to be supplied by her friends. The old moated Grange was in itself an attraction, and as nothing much was going on in war-time, it was expected that many of the people in the district would take the opportunity, to spend their money in aid of the good cause, and have an enjoyable afternoon's entertainment.

Mrs. Wiseman, the Mayoress, took the affair up with the greatest enthusiasm. She came to see Miss Brookes and between them they devised a programme.

"Make it something in the nature of a gymkhana," she urged, "something that the neighbours themselves can take part in; then they'll be sure to come."

In this way the first modest idea of a garden fête, thanks to the co-operation of the mayoress, grew to quite large dimensions. The school was immensely excited about it. The prefects called a committee, and when all the girls were assembled Beatrice made an important suggestion.

"We ought to have a stall of our own! It's such an opportunity. Can't you each write home and ask your people to send you at least one or two things—small things that would sell readily? We might make quite a lot for the Red Cross."

"Can we have raffles?"

"Or a bran tub?"

"Bags me help to serve!"

"Me too!"

"Now listen!" commanded Beatrice. "You can't all act stall-holders. They'll have to be chosen from those girls who aren't taking part in the entertainment. It must be settled later. What's got to be done now is write home and wangle anything you can from your people, and rub it in that it's in aid of the Red Cross."

As a result of this conference more than sixty urgent letters were dispatched to parents, and presently many parcels arrived at the Grange, containing various articles for the stall, of different values. These were eagerly reviewed and sorted out, some little things for a bran-tub, and more expensive things to be auctioned or raffled for, if raffling was within bounds of the law, which Beatrice doubted.

"The Mayor'll be there, you see!" she objected.

"Perhaps he'll turn a blind eye!"

"Yes, but we don't want the police after us!"

"Well, raffle a thing and then make the winner pay sixpence for it! I know that's done at bazaars!"

"A good way of getting out of it!"

Some of the parents had sent bars of chocolate, which their daughters heroically surrendered to make a small sweet stall, to which they all also gave up their weekly supply of pear and acid drops, as a patriotic demonstration for the cause.

"I suppose we can buy them back on the day?" asked several of the juniors anxiously.

"Yes, but you must give the visitors a chance first," decreed Hester.

"Wow! There'll be such a queue there won't be any left for us!"

“Don’t be greedy!”

“You can’t eat your cake and have it!” snapped Moira.

“I’m not talking of cake, it’s sweets!”

“That’ll do, Miss Clever!”

Miss Gerrard, anxious that her pupils should do her credit on this great occasion, was holding many rehearsals in the garden. Mothers had sent the costumes which girls had worn at the Easter entertainment at Ashmont, so all was in good order. Marian and Hilda indeed were rather out of it. They had no costumes for the folk dances, so could not be included. Their only part was to join in the chorus that was to sing “This England” and “Drake’s Drum”. As members of the singing class they had at least that privilege. They looked wistfully as their companions tried on pretty dresses, and felt somehow aloof from the school, as had been the case when it first arrived. They had not now the consolation of ownership of the Grange, which had formerly given them a sense of distinction.

To Marian especially this was a bitter blow. Things of late had certainly been very unlucky for their branch of the Bevan family. To be raised to a pinnacle and then topple down again is almost worse than never to rise at all. She had seen little of Arthur. He had made excuses to avoid coming to the Grange to meet Mrs. William Bevan and Billy; either he was due at a cricket match in Leomford, or he was helping Mr. Lowman somewhere on the farm. Marian did not blame him. She would have kept out of the way of the new owners herself had that been possible.

Arthur, prospective heir after his father, must be even more disappointed, in spite of his attitude of stoicism.

"I'll come to your carnival," he consented, when one day she caught him at the Abbey, "and I'll take a squint at them from among the crowd, but please don't introduce me. I draw the line at that anyhow. I shall join the Air Force when I'm old enough. I've made up my mind about that. Derrick's joining! He's giving up teaching at the end of the term and going into the R.A.F. So are two of the other masters."

After a very great amount of preparation the Grange was ready for the fête on the momentous Saturday afternoon. On the Friday Mrs. William Bevan had suddenly announced that she would like to have a stall herself, and had ordered Amos to pick a number of apples, any early plums that were ripe, and a selection of vegetables and flowers, that ought to find a ready sale. Miss Brookes looked rather blank at this depletion of garden produce, but decided it did not matter, as the school would break up on the following Tuesday, and after all the fruit and vegetables were the property of the owners. Amos grumbled and muttered to himself, but he could not refuse to obey, especially as his new mistress stood over him, making choice of the best she could find. She arranged a very attractive stall, with the aid of two prefects, who were to help her to sell later on.

Visitors began to arrive even before the stipulated hour, and Miss Laxon was stationed at the Lodge gate to receive the entrance money. Boys and girls with gaily decorated bicycles and mothers wheeling prams containing blooming babies surged up the

drive, a special bus deposited people from Leomford, and others followed in cars or on foot. Villages and farms in the neighbourhood contributed their quota to swell the crowd. The band of the Boys' Brigade marched proudly in and began to play some lively tunes. Lastly the Mayor and Mayoress arrived in their car, and were conducted to seats of honour placed on a bank overlooking the lawn where the entertainment was to be held. They wore their Municipal chains, which gave an air of civic distinction to the fête.

The ceremony was about to begin. One of the Boys' Brigade blew a loud blast on his bugle, and the babble of talk ceased as all eyes were turned towards the openers. The Mayor gave a speech first. He was a hearty jovial man, and knew how to suit his audience. He made many jokes before he stepped back amid a storm of applause, and led his lady forward. Mrs. Wiseman also was fluent of speech, and specially urged the claims of the Red Cross. "Every shilling you give will help, and it is with great pleasure that I declare this fête open."

The programme began with the singing of "This England" by the school choir; then as the Mayoress considered the babies might grow restive if left too long, the pram parade was taken next. As judge she had chosen the Matron of the Leomford Hospital, who might be considered above any favouring of candidates, and who closely scrutinized each chubby infant as the procession passed, finally awarding prizes to a bouncing girl of six months and a round-faced boy of one year, though she paid a compliment

to every mother upon the healthy appearance of her special child.

The cycle parade came immediately after, so that the candidates might stack their machines when it was over, and enjoy the fun of the festival. Both boys and girls had been ingenious in devising decorations and carnival costumes, often made of coloured paper. The Mayor, in spite of his protests, was proclaimed judge, and gave the prizes to a "Rose Queen", an advertisement of "Biscuits", and an "Old Man of the Sea", adding a "well done", however, to each unsuccessful one that filed by.

It was now the turn of the school. Some of the girls gave a demonstration of Keep Fit, in which there was a particularly charming item of ball throwing, they tossed the balls from one to another, as they paraded round, with the graceful action of ancient Greek maidens, not once allowing them to drop, a feat that had needed great dexterity and much practice. A Highland Fling followed given by Janie and Alison, dressed in Scottish tartans, and an Irish reel by Bessie and Mona, attired in green skirts and red cloaks to represent daughters of Eire. There was a dance of Fairies by the juniors, wearing gauzy dresses and wreaths of flowers, which received overwhelming applause and had to be encored, and there were several pretty folk dances and Morris dances, in appropriate costumes.

When these were over the Mayoress announced that there would now be an interval, when she hoped everybody would patronize the stalls and the side shows, and that the programme would be continued later on

and would include some competitions for young visitors.

The audience dispersed, some to do their duty in buying, and others, the junior portion particularly, to amuse themselves with shying at an "Aunt Sally", throwing balls through hoops, knocking down skittles and other diversions. The stalls did very well as there were many pretty things which were not too expensive.

Presently the urns were brought out, cups of tea were provided with cakes and biscuits at the refreshment stall, and were soon in great request. The Mayor was busy organizing races for the junior visitors, and presenting small packets of sweets as prizes. He was in his element among the little folk; they swarmed round him like bees, and he seemed to be enjoying the fête equally with themselves, swinging them at a game of honeypots, or picking them up when they fell in a boisterous backward race.

Mrs. William Bevan had cleared more than half the contents of her stall, and, seeing the urns arrive, she left two prefects in charge. She took Billy with her and went in search of refreshment. She joined a group already receiving teacups, the Mayoress, Miss Brookes, and the rector, and was soon chatting affably to them. Now it happened that a unit of Canadian troops had lately arrived in England and were stationed at a camp a couple of miles away. Mr. Derrick had visited the camp and made friends with some of the men, and he had persuaded a few of them to come to the fête on the grounds that it would give them an opportunity of seeing an old-fashioned English merry-making.

Privates Hilton, Thompson and Foster had re-

sponded to the invitation and were apparently enjoying the scene. As fate would have it they now came strolling up to the refreshment stall. Private Hilton glanced idly round, but when his gaze chanced to encounter Mrs. William Bevan a look spread over his face first of incredulity then of absolute amazement.

"Louise!" he gasped. "Louise!"

Mrs. William started and turned round. For a moment there flashed in her eyes the gleam of terror of one who suddenly sees a yawning chasm before her. She recovered herself instantly, and forced a smile.

"Tom! Where did you spring from?"

"I'm over with our unit, at the camp at Corfield. But what are *you* doing here in England? You, and Harry," he added, looking at the boy, who stood gaping at him open-mouthed.

"Billy!" she corrected sharply.

Utter bewilderment appeared on the countenance of Private Hilton.

"*Billy!*" he repeated. "Why, Billy died more than three years ago! I was at the poor little chap's funeral! This is Harry!"

"You're making a very great mistake," she flared. "I'll explain to you later. I must hurry back to my stall now. I've left it too long. Come, Billy!"

Looking pale even under her make-up, she put her half-finished cup on the tray, and pushed her way among the crowd, followed by her boy. Private Hilton stared after her retreating figure with a puzzled frown.

"This beats me!" he muttered.

The rector, who had listened with keen attention, now stepped forward and introduced himself.

"Do I understand that you were acquainted with Mrs. William Bevan in Canada?" he asked.

"You bet I was! Why, we grew up as kids. Their ranch was next to ours."

"Then you knew her husband, William Bevan?"

"I guess so, and her first husband, Sam Gordon."

"She was married previously?"

"That's right. She married Will Bevan before Sam had been dead a year."

"And this boy of hers? Whose child is he?"

"Sam Gordon's! She was left a widow with a baby of a month old—that's Harry all right."

"Had she and William Bevan a son?"

"Yes, poor little Billy. He died of scarlet fever. I was at his funeral."

"There's something very queer here," murmured the rector.

"I don't understand! What's wrong?"

"Well, you see, Mrs. William Bevan has come to England to claim this estate for her son, whom she declares to be the son and heir of William Bevan, and thus legally entitled to the property of his late grandfather, Mr. Tristram Bevan."

Private Hilton emitted an amazed whistle.

"So that's what Louise is up to! Well, I'd never have thought it of her, never!"

"Would you be prepared to swear that this boy is not the son of William Bevan?"

"I could swear he's Harry Gordon! I know him well enough."

"Then may I have your name and address. This matter must be seen to at once."

The Mayoress now interposed.

"Mrs. Bevan offered to explain. Perhaps it is only fair to let her do so. Shall we go and find her? She'll be at her stall."

"By all means," agreed the rector.

Accompanied by the Canadian soldiers and Miss Brookes they went in quest of the lady, but neither she nor her boy were at the stall. The prefects in charge said they had gone to get tea and had not returned.

Miss Brookes shook her head and glanced eloquently at Mr. Carter.

"She's done a bunk!" grunted Private Foster, nudging Private Thompson.

"I wouldn't have thought it of Louise! Why, I've known her since we were kids. We went to school together!" protested Private Hilton.

"You can never really know about anyone!" murmured Private Thompson.

"Not when it's a question of dollars, I guess!" agreed Private Foster.

"We had better say nothing about this for the present," said the rector, "but I shall write at once to the firm of lawyers who are trustees for the property. They will take a statement, and no doubt will easily be able to obtain the death certificate of the true son of William Bevan. It was an impudent fraud to try and palm off one boy as another. I wonder she dared to attempt it."

"You bet she's skedaddled now she's found out," ventured Private Thompson.

Mrs. William Bevan was certainly missing from the fête, but nobody noticed her absence particularly, for

the rest of the programme had begun. There was more folk dancing, a carnival procession, some songs by the school choir, and finally everybody joined in singing the National Anthem, led by the band of the Boys' Brigade. It had been a successful afternoon for the Red Cross Fund, and more eventful than, as yet, anyone could have imagined.

CHAPTER XX

A Lone Plane

The school was to break up on Tuesday morning, when all the girls were to go home, with the exception of Marian and Hilda. Their mother had arranged to come back on the Wednesday, and Miss Brookes would await her arrival to settle up various matters in connexion with the Grange.

"Mums hasn't yet said where we're to go for our holidays!" grumbled Hilda. "Wasn't there some talk about Aunt Netta at Keswick?"

"I believe there was, but we've heard no more," sighed Marian. "I don't see how we can stop here if Mrs. William is going to take possession. I, for one, shouldn't care to stay, and I'm sure Artie wouldn't."

"Will it mean good-bye to the Grange then? I believe Billy'd like to have us! We're sort of chums."

"Oh, bother Billy," said Marian crossly. "I hope to goodness Mum's will whisk us off somewhere, and that we shall never see either him or his precious mother again!"

On the Monday the girls were all so busy packing that none noticed particularly that Mrs. William Bevan and her boy did not come as usual to the Grange. Miss Brookes, however, made a private inquiry about them, and ascertained that on Saturday evening they had left the farm where they had been staying, and had caught a late train to London, on the plea of sudden and urgent business. She nodded significantly to herself, but kept the matter secret, as the rector had requested. She had plenty of preparations of her own to keep her occupied. The teachers were to travel with the girls, and she would remain to wind up the term's accounts and sign reports. She had enjoyed the evacuation to Maenan Grange, and her position there as head mistress. It had been a wonderfully peaceful time, so remote from the war, and an opportunity of carrying out her own special ideas. She only hoped it might continue after the holidays, but that decision would be for the education committee.

On Tuesday morning buses arrived to convey most of the school to the station, those girls who had bicycles riding their machines.

Marian and Hilda stood on the steps to see them off.

"Well, good-bye, old thing!"

"See you again someday!"

"It's not been half a bad term!"

"Glad to go home though!"

'By by to the old Grange!"

And ta-ta to the ghosts!"

"Love to Billy when you see him!"

"Pity you're not coming with us, but of course you don't live at Ashmont."

"I'll send you a postcard."

"So-long!"

With these farewell salutations the girls departed, and Marian and Hilda were left as the sole remnant of the school. Things felt rather stale and quiet without their jovial companions. They wandered round the garden, fed the poultry, and began to pack in case they should go to Keswick. The house seemed strangely silent and empty.

"I don't think I want to sleep in that big dormitory all by myself," ventured Hilda suddenly.

"Neither do I," agreed Marian. "Let's ask if we may move our things for to-night into the room next to Miss Brookes, and sleep together."

"Oh, yes! I really should be scared alone!"

The Head, surrounded by papers in the warden's room, readily consented and the exchange was made.

"Mummie will be here to-morrow!" insisted Hilda, with much satisfaction.

Meals in solitary company with Miss Brookes were a new experience, and when bed-time came they were glad to retire together, and to know that the mistress was sleeping next door. Though they pretended they were not superstitious there was still the uneasy apprehension that the Grange was haunted, and that ghostly footsteps might be heard echoing in the corridors.

It had always been a subject for congratulation that Maenan was situated in such a far-away spot on the border of the Welsh hills that no alerts had ever been heard there. Yet on this very night of all nights the charm was broken. While it was still dark they were

suddenly roused by the sound of a siren from Leomford. Miss Brookes sprang out of bed, dressed hurriedly, telling the two girls to do the same, then conducted them to the cellar, which had been arranged as an air-raid shelter, though never previously used, except once or twice for an A.R.P. rehearsal. Here they sat for some time, yet nothing happened. Then at last came the whirr of a plane overhead. Probably it was returning from a raid elsewhere, and either attracted by the gleam of the moat, or anxious to get rid of a last bomb, selected the Grange as a target. There was a whiz and a tremendous bang and a crash.

"That's hit us!" ejaculated Miss Brookes. "What a mercy the school has gone home!"

There was no more to be heard. It seemed to be a solitary effort. No more enemy planes passed overhead. After perhaps half an hour the "all clear" sounded from Leomford. They emerged from the cellar, and opening the front door found that the dawn was just breaking. Telling the girls to stay where they were Miss Brookes went to investigate and see what damage had been done. She found that the main portion of the Grange was untouched, but that the bomb had fallen on the old tower, breaking down a part of it, and making a big crater in the ground. The house seemed quite safe, and there was no sign of fire anywhere. Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths came from the lodge, much perturbed, and helped her in her survey of the establishment.

"We thought we were done for when we heard that smash!" quavered Amos.

"It's a miracle we escaped," agreed Miss Brookes.

"Best make a cup of tea," fluttered Mrs. Griffiths. "There's nothing like a cup of tea to hearten one up."

After the excitement of the night an early breakfast was most acceptable. Soon afterwards several air wardens arrived, they also inspected the damage and agreed that the main part of the house had not suffered. Miss Brookes asked one of them to ride into Leomford on his bicycle as soon as the telegraph office would be open, and send a wire to Captain Bevan. She hoped he might obtain emergency leave and come over with his wife. In the circumstances, particularly with the added matter concerning Mrs. William Bevan, she felt his presence was highly desirable. Her surmise was correct, he was able to get his leave, and they both arrived by an evening train. Marian, Arthur and Hilda welcomed them with enthusiasm.

Miss Brookes, in a private conversation that evening, had much news to impart. They were astounded at the revelations about Mrs. William Bevan and anxious to communicate at once with the lawyers.

"I must see this soldier, and the rector too. It seems as if I'm actually going to have the property after all!" exclaimed Captain Bevan.

"Don't tell the children yet!" warned his wife. "A second disappointment would be too bitter if anything were to go wrong."

"No, no, I'll keep the secret yet a while. We mustn't congratulate ourselves too soon."

On the next day Captain Bevan made a careful investigation of the bombed portion of the Grange. Most of the old tower had fallen down, but adhering to the

inner wall he could see the remnant of a small room which he had not known existed.

"Great Scott! I believe it's the secret chamber!" he guessed. "I always said there was one!"

Half of the floor was torn away, but on the small space left he could see what appeared to be a chest.

In spite of grave dangers he managed to clamber up. It was certainly an ancient chest, and on opening the lid he found it contained several pieces of tarnished silver which looked like ecclesiastical vessels.

"Whew! The Abbey treasure!" he whistled. "Not much left of it though, if this is all!"

It was indeed a discovery. Evidently there had been a secret room which could be entered from the Grange, and that in here the monks must have hidden some of the treasures of the Abbey. A great search was made among the debris of the tower in the hope of finding more things, but nothing turned up. There was only that in the old oak chest, the contents of which had probably been rifled before. The rector, keenly interested, regarded the find from an archæological point of view, declaring the articles were rare fourteenth-century patens and chalices, undoubtedly from the Abbey, saved from the loot organized by Henry VIII. With Captain Bevan's permission he carried them away to his rectory to exhibit to members of his Antiquarian Society, as great enthusiasts as himself.

"I once saw a Latin inventory of the Abbey plate," declared the Rev. Canon Jones, D.D., "there were items of marvellous silver and gilt chalices, crucifixes, crosses, censers and patens, these can only be the remnant. What became of the rest?"

The rector shook his head and did not commit himself.

"Of course the monks would be obliged to leave some for the commissioners at the great pillage, in order to conceal part of the treasure. The Abbey was known to be rich, and an empty sanctuary would not have been believed," commented Dr. Hudson, F.S.A.

"No doubt that's the explanation," agreed Major Gibbs.

"It's marvellous luck that even these should have been discovered after four centuries," rejoiced Professor Abbott, who was an expert on ecclesiastical ornaments.

The rector had his own opinions, but thought it wiser, in loyalty to his former friend Tristram Bevan, to keep these strictly to himself. He had written at once to the lawyers in charge of the Maenan Grange Trust, informing them of what had happened on the Saturday afternoon.

Mr. Elkington, a partner of the firm, lost no time in coming to investigate. He interviewed Private Hilton, got him to make a sworn statement before a magistrate, wired to Canada, and received a cable in return confirming the death certificate of the young son of William Bevan. Official copies would follow later, but meanwhile Mr. Elkington was able to assure Captain Bevan that he was now the undoubted heir to the estate and that when certain legal matters were concluded the Trust could be closed and he would become owner.

Mrs. William Bevan and her son had entirely

vanished. She had not called at the lawyers' offices in London, nor had their landlady at the farm received any word from her. She had arrived with only a few suitcases as luggage, and had taken these and all papers and letters away with her when they went off so hastily. She had paid her weekly bill, but had left no address. Private Hilton, when interrogated, said that after the deaths of her second husband and his son Billy, she had taken Harry and gone away to the United States. He had lost sight of them entirely until he chanced to meet them at the Maenan Grange fête. He had no idea where any letter would find her. Perhaps, for old sakes' sake, he was unwilling to put the lawyer on her track, and professed ignorance to shield her.

It was on the last evening of his leave that Captain Bevan revealed to his children the good news of his now established ownership. Miss Brookes had gone, so the united family were by themselves. Their amazement and rejoicing can be imagined.

"The Grange is really yours!"

"I can hardly believe it!"

"After all these upsets!"

"It's almost too good to be true!"

When they had discussed the matter for a little while, Marian inquired:

"What has become of Mrs. William?"

"She was clever enough, after meeting Private Hilton, to see that her game was up, and to beat a retreat in time. Probably she and her boy shipped back to America by the first vessel available, and will hide themselves somewhere in the United States."

"Will she be prosecuted for fraud?" asked Arthur.

"No, I talked that over with Mr. Elkington, and we agreed that the legal difficulties of an extradition treaty in war-time would be too great, and also that we wished to avoid having a family scandal aired in the newspapers. After all she was the daughter-in-law of Uncle Tristram, and a relation by marriage to ourselves. Her plot failed, so we'll leave it at that."

"I wonder what will become of Billy—I mean Harry," asked Hilda. "I liked *him*, yes I liked him very much."

"It was not the poor boy's fault. No doubt his mother coached him for the part, and insisted on his impersonation of his dead half-brother. He's not to blame."

"He didn't care for Maenan. He was always longing to go back to a ranch. He told me so," vouchsafed Hilda.

"Then he'll be far happier in America; it would have been miserable for him to live here under a false name, knowing his claim was a dishonest one."

"The Drumming Well *really* drummed, Daddy, just before they came here. Wasn't that queer? It seemed like an omen."

"I don't wonder it drummed considering Arthur had just dropped a bucket down it. I know that well. It's fed by an underground spring, and after rain it bubbles up. The bucket would bump against the sides, and make a fine drumming sound. That's the end of your omen, Miss Superstitious."

"Oh, dear!"

"The bomb dropped by the lone plane has cleared

up the Mystery of the Grange and laid its ghosts," continued Captain Bevan. "I always suspected a secret room must be concealed somewhere, and—this is quite between ourselves, mind you—that Uncle Tristram found the treasure, and disposed of most of it, quietly and by degrees, to dealers in London or elsewhere. How else could he have got so much money? Nowhere. As it was in the Grange it was doubtless his property, though he avoided consulting the law about it. I shall hand over the pieces that are left to the Leomford Museum."

"Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths also took toll?" inquired Mrs. Bevan.

"Highly likely. They probably discovered the entrance to the secret room, and that old rascal Amos would make his wife go there, even when the school was in residence. He would sell a piece now and again to some dealer in Leomford, who would ask no questions. How else could a crucifix be dropped in the passage? But we haven't the slightest scrap of real evidence against them. They stoutly deny all knowledge of a secret room or any concealed treasure."

"Shall you dismiss them?" asked Arthur.

"No, I've not any proof that they've been dishonest in other matters, and it would be extremely difficult to find another gardener and domestic help during the war, when everyone is needed on the farms. We had best put up with them, for the duration at any rate. We can't be left with nobody."

"Will the school come back?" inquired Marian.

"I expect so. There's no reason why it shouldn't. Miss Brookes thinks the education authorities will be

only too glad to continue the arrangement. The tower is to be repaired, and the house was not injured."

"You'll stay with us, Mummie?" begged Hilda, cuddling her mother's hand.

"Just for the holidays. I had better be on the spot to look after things here, and Miss Norris, the assistant warden, can act deputy for me at the hostel during August. I shall enjoy a rest now, with you children, but I must return to my war work in September."

"Didn't you say, Daddy, that taking over the Grange was a gamble?"

"I believe I did. It certainly seemed so at the time, and I was half inclined to refuse the offer as it then stood. But if I had done so the chain of events might never have happened: it was Arthur, it seems, who aroused Mr. Derrick's interest in the Grange, and suggested to him to invite some of the Canadian soldiers to the fête. But for that Private Hilton would not have met Mrs. William, and she and her son might have remained in undisputed possession. Strange how great things sometimes hang on very small incidents."

"Luck, Daddy!" laughed Hilda.

"Yes, gambler's luck, I suppose!" agreed Captain Bevan.

10813